

Fantasy Tales



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THE OLYMPIC RUNNER
BY DENNIS ETONISON

A MAGAZINE OF THE WEIRD AND UNUSUAL

FANTASY TALES

130 Park View, Wembley, Middx. HA9 6JU. U.K.

BACK ISSUES

FANTASY TALES has been published regularly since 1977. In that time it has won The British Fantasy Award on four successive occasions, and in 1984 was presented with the World Fantasy Award... The lead story in issue 8 -- THE DARK COUNTRY, by Dennis Etchison -- won both the British and World Fantasy Awards and stories from the magazine are regularly reprinted in collections and anthologies -- including DAW Books' YEAR'S BEST HORROR STORIES series. The aim of FANTASY TALES is to re-create the look and entertainment value of the pulp magazines of the 1930s and '40s, and to this end we publish fiction, art and verse, by both established authors and newcomers to the genre. Each issue is digest size, has more than 50 pages, and from issue 13 onwards boasts full-colour, glossy covers. A number of issues are now out of print -- and have become much sought-after collector's items -- however, we can still offer the following few back issues:

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A MAGAZINE OF THE WEIRD AND UNUSUAL

FANTASY TALES

Volume
8

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STEPHEN JONES, *Editor.*

DAVID A. SUTTON, *Associate Editor.*

"There was something loose in the ground, and it was running out all around her."



The Olympic Runner

By DENNIS ETCHISON

Illustration by RODGER GERBERDING

DRIVING, she thought: This is about the time I'd be getting ready to crawl back into bed.

With Lori and Elizabeth fed and dressed and out the door to meet the school bus, there would be nothing more to worry about for a while. Geoff always dropped Erin off for her car pool on his way to work; neither of them needed or wanted Casey's help in the mornings. And then she would have a precious hour to herself, before it began again with the neighbours and the gardener and the washing and the mail and the bank and the market and the cleaners, the employment agency and the lawyers...

No, the last two came later, after Geoff left for good, after Erin ran away. Since then things had become too complicated to allow her even a few extra minutes under the covers. What could she have been thinking?

"Did you know," said Lori from the back seat, "that in the summertime your index fingernail grows fifty percent faster?"

Casey snapped to. She tightened her grip on the wheel and blinked, aware once again of the sea and the guard rail, of the car swerving too close to the yellow cliffs. There was no time for dozing. This was real life. She steered back to the centre of the narrow lane, her left front tyre erasing the dotted line, and tried to remember how she had gotten here. For a few seconds she could not. It seemed impossible, a bad dream. She lowered her windshield visor against the merciless glare and reached for the rearview mirror to be sure Lori was there.

"Mom? Are you listening to me?"

"I am, baby. I promise. Faster than what?"

"Um, it doesn't say."

The car steadied as she regained control. The sea shifted, then settled again into a smooth blanket of the purest cerulean blue under the bright light bulb of

the morning sun. Just then something skittered down the cliffside and tumbled out into the highway; she veered to avoid it, unreasonably frightened. When the tyres struck and crushed it there was a soft pattering like knuckles against the underseal. She rolled her window down and tried to locate what was left of it, but she was too late.

"What was that?"

"Nothing, baby. A loose rock."

"Are you sure?"

As they rounded the curve, she framed a last glimpse of a tiny mound of sandstone in the mirror. "Yes, I'm sure. I was afraid it was an animal. You know, the kind that run out in the road and freeze when they see a car coming? What do they call them? You remember. We read a story about it. When you were little."

"Armadillos?"

"I don't think so. Not around here."

"Um, did you know that armadillos are the only animals besides humans that get leprosy?"

"No, I didn't know that. Thank you."

She hid her amusement from her daughter, who lately could not tolerate any degree of teasing. "Are you getting hungry?"

"I'm on a diet." The girl made a breathy, impatient sound. "Can't we listen to some music? You haven't turned the radio on since we left L.A."

"Certainly. All you have to do is ask. Politely."

Casey flicked the radio on, but only static came out of the speakers, a white sound like surf filling the car. She pushed the buttons one by one but now, away from home, all the presets were wrong. She curled the knob past the weak, reflected voices of unfamiliar DJs, the latest installment of Dr. Gene Scott's quasi-religious marathon, an all-news station. At the moment it was time for another sports break, with more information per second than the human mind could comprehend about the current

Olympics. No matter where she turned, Casey could not escape the feeling that someone was trying to sell her something. She was not sure she wanted any of it. She yawned to clear her head.

"Did you bring my tapes?" asked Lori. She clattered through the box under the seat and handed up a battered cassette. "Here. Play side two."

Casey sighed. "Whatever you say." She was determined that this trip not turn into a nightmare for both of them. A little music, she told herself. That couldn't hurt. It would keep her awake.

The highway wound higher, an endless torture test under a deceptively peaceful sky. The terrain did not permit her to see very far ahead; occasionally she caught flashes of open space and the suggestion of a new topography, but the view was so frequently obstructed, so fragmented that it was impossible to tell whether she was making any real progress. Behind her, Lori shuffled her Dynamite Magazines aside and returned to her copy of *The Book of Uncommon Knowledge*, the million-seller paperback that Casey had not had time to read. By the sound of some of the excerpts Lori had recited, Casey did not know if she should bother. She found it stupefying, lists of facts that did not relate to her life in any manner that might help. In truth they only made her feel that much less competent, the way a close-up of crystal formations under a microscope in college had left her dizzy, without perspective, as if she were confronting an alien landscape.

She eased her neck into the headrest and waited for the next road sign. She had never been this way before, and now the sky and the sea in the distance flattened and receded, the beach appearing dangerously detached, as if the highway had come unstuck from the shoreline. She forced herself to focus on the dashboard and inserted the tape.

Soon she recognised the pinched, nasal singing of a notoriously genderless pop star whose cross-dressing had got him banned from network television a decade-and-a-half ago; responding to the demands of a changing market, he had recently resurfaced in the guise of a romantic crooner. The new persona was thin and unconvincing to anyone old enough to remember more than last season's styles, but her ten-year-old daughter did not seem to notice. For Casey, however, the

effect was weirdly disorienting. The generic voice was as false as beaten aluminum, the song a lush overstatement of the love between man and woman, something he knew nothing about. He's got it wrong, Casey thought. Or does he? Perhaps he was right to mock it in this way; after all, what was it about but self-delusion? Was his exaggeration as perverse as it seemed? Or was it the perfect deadpan satire? Did it matter? Is it about anything, she wondered, anything that counts in the long run? She lowered the volume as far as she dared and tried not to listen.

"It's going to be time for lunch soon," she said when the tape ended. "There should be an Anderson's Split Pea Restaurant coming up in a few miles. At least I think that's what the sign said. Why don't you help me watch for it?"

"I told you, Mom, I'm on a diet. You don't even listen to me."

All right, thought Casey, okay, I give up. I haven't done anything well enough to please anybody in a long time. Why should today be different? She leaned back and slitted her eyes against the blinding summer's day and drove on.

"Why can't we wait and eat with Erin? Aren't we going to take her out for lunch? The food there must be awful."

"Yes. No. Not lunch, baby. We won't make it in time. We're not even halfway there."

"But when we do, she is coming with us, isn't she? Home, I mean?"

"What home?" Casey snapped.

"What does that mean? Dad gave you the house, didn't he? We still have a place to live. What are you talking about?"

"Us," Casey told her. "He gave it to all of us, to you and your sisters. But only because the court told him to. He didn't do me any favours. Get that straight, young lady."

"And the car. He left you this car, didn't he? All right, us. Lizzy and Erin and I are old enough to drive the car anytime we want to, right? I'm sure! Plus he sends you cheques twice a month. We could be a lot worse off. What are you complaining about?"

It's about the time when I'm lying in bed, half-asleep and half-awake, waiting for the snooze alarm to go off again. That time when I can't tell what's real and what isn't. That's it. It's that way all the time now. That's what it's really about.

EVENTUALLY the cliffs leveled and opened to the shallow bay at Pismo Beach, where the sun's high angle was diffused by a residue of late-morning mist. Casey left the highway and searched for a place to stop. Along the waterfront she saw young people wearing Top-Siders and personal stereos side by side with retirees in ventilated Olympics caps and walking shorts, each group vying for its rightful space at the edge of the continent, at the last westward frontier. It was an uneasy coexistence at best, one that could not continue indefinitely.

"I don't like it here," Lori said.

"Why not?"

"It reminds me of old people."

"And what's wrong with that? You used to love going to Grandma and Grandpa's. We all did. The swings in the back yard..."

"Who?"

"You and your sisters."

"That wasn't us, Mom. You're thinking of somebody else."

She realized with a start that Lori was right. Casey's parents had sold the house where she grew up, the one with the swings, and moved to the mobile home park near the coast before Lori and Elizabeth were born, when Erin was still a baby.

"We don't have to stop and see them, do we?" said Lori. "I thought we were in a hurry."

"Did I say anything about seeing Grandma and Grandpa today?" Casey did not want to fight. She did not have enough of anything left inside her for that. "All right, where would you like to stop? Even if you're not eating. Because I know I'm going to be hungry before we get to Lockwood."

"The Pink Virgin Inn," said Lori, consulting her book. "It says right here that it's one of California's Ten Most Exotic Attractions. They call it a Must-See."

Casey shuddered. She recalled the Pink Virgin Inn all too well. It was indeed exotic, right up there with the Winchester Mystery House and Hearst Castle, a monument to kitsch built by a multi-millionaire flying saucer buff's widow as a memorial to their undying love. Geoff had taken her there for one night of their honeymoon fourteen years ago. One night was enough. In the morning they had wandered arm in arm through the pink-flocked corridors, past rose quartz copies of Michaelangelo's David (with fig

leaf added) and Rodin's The Kiss, and out into the grounds, where the moist pink rim of a heart-shaped swimming pool glistened like the lips of an obscenely-exposed secret orifice. At the time it had seemed sweetly campy, almost touching; in retrospect it was clear that Geoff had made a joke of their marriage even then, from the very beginning. No, the Pink Virgin Inn would be better left to other sadly misguided couples on their way to or from quickie weddings in Reno, or as a protection against saucer landings. If the space people had any sense they'd take one look at it and pass over, leaving California to the natives.

"It's too far from here," said Casey matter-of-factly. "It's quite a ways inland. We don't have enough time."

"Right, Mom." Lori made the second word into a curse.

"My, look at the boats," said Casey with great effort, maneuvering down an esplanade constricted by the unwieldy bulk of parked recreational vehicles.

"So many. And the fishermen. Are those yellowtail? Lori, put down your book and pay attention. This is educational."

In the back seat, Lori made a breathy, disgusted sound.

Once they were out of town the ocean stretched away nearly at eye level, poised to lap over the pavement and engulf the car in an attempt to further erode the sand dunes on the other side. Casey drove without making any more suggestions; if Lori did not want to enjoy the trip, that was her problem. They still had a long way to go before nightfall, and Casey's stomach tensed at the prospect of locating the facility after dark. And there was something else. As she picked up speed along the frontage road and returned to Route 1, following the coastline, she could not avoid thinking again of her parents, and the subject filled her with confusingly mixed emotions.

She had been to see her mother and father seldom in recent years. Perhaps twice with the entire family, when the girls were small, and not often before that when her parents still had the big house. They had rarely come down to L.A., though there was more than enough room. It was because of Geoff. Wasn't that right? Coming from a broken home himself, he had never been comfortable with a traditional family scene. It wasn't his fault. She told herself that. When

the arguments started she blamed herself, convinced that she was slighting him in some way. That was how he made her feel. After he had embarrassed her in front of them one time too many she decided it was not worth the trouble. They would understand. They would have to. They could do that, couldn't they?

They did, she was sure of it. She had a life, a husband and children of her own, with demands on her time that she could not ignore. The truth was that she did not want them to see that her marriage was less than ideal. Hadn't they raised her properly? The visits dwindled until each episode took on an impossible weight, so that she was practically out of her mind with nervousness by the time she got there. And yet, they seemed to understand.

And that only made it worse. When she went to see them on her own, it became more and more of a strain to convince them that nothing was wrong. They asked few questions, preferring to maintain a respectful distance, to avoid the appearance of meddling, until they slipped so far away from her that they began to fade like the memory of a past life. Soon they no longer had anything in common to talk about - the estrangement became complete. And still they never complained. She carried the guilt inside her like a private wound, waiting and hoping that time would heal it somehow, but that had not happened yet. And now it was too late. How could she tell them that her husband had left her, that her first-born had run away? They would think it was her fault, just as Geoff said. Most of the time she believed it herself. He had taught her that.

They would never know how close to them she had come today, or even that she had had to make such a trip. And that was almost sadder than anything else.

She left the highway again at Morro Bay and found a parking space behind Dorn's Restaurant, though the thought of lunch made her nauseous. Yet she had to feed her daughter, didn't she? The entrance was decorated with patriotic bunting to advertise a special menu in honour of the Olympics. A TV newscast reported preparations for the 1500 and 5000 meter men's finals; she ignored it. As Casey and Lori sat at a window table, buttering fragrant rolls and watching sailboats dip like birds through the glittering waters, she tried to unwind

for the first time all morning.

It was pleasant here, the conversations at the surrounding tables friendly, the voices of other travelers who had taken refuge in this safe harbour. But what could she say to them? She and Lori were probably the only two customers who were not following the Games in Los Angeles, and there was no reason why they should be interested in her problems. She ordered a cup of clam chowder and a croissant sandwich - with any luck Lori would share it - and turned her attention to the glorious oceanfront panorama that now shone through the lifting fog. A flock of gulls flew past the glass, their wings shaped like the tops of hearts, and settled lazily on the dock to warm their breasts in the midday sun.

"Did you know," said Lori, opening another pat of butter, "that fourteen percent of the sea gulls in the Caribbean are gay?"

"Keep your voice down," said Casey. "This isn't the Caribbean."

"No shit, Sherlock," said Lori.

An elderly couple at the next table glanced up, then frowned into their fruit cups.

Casey took hold of Lori's arm. "Don't you ever speak to me that way again," she whispered. Under the table, she squeezed the girl's wrist fiercely. "Do you hear me?"

"*Chuh*," said Lori.

Casey took a good look at her, at the untamed wisps of hair over her eyes, at the new insolence in the line of her jaw. It was a stunningly accurate imitation of her big sister. Casey was on the verge of losing her, too. Like Erin, would she start skipping school, then run away when she realized that her father was never coming back? Was she already hiding drugs in her room? And yet Casey knew that her daughter was not to blame.

"You know," she said softly, "it hasn't been easy for me, trying to hold a family together. You might try to understand that. You're a big girl now." "Why don't you let Doug be the man?" said Lori. "You don't have to act tough just because Dad's gone."

She thought of the man she had met only a few months ago, when she was still a basket case. Yes, he was a part of their lives now. But for how long?

"What makes you think he's going to hang around once he finds out what rotten excuses for daughters I've got?"

Instantly she regretted saying that. It wasn't true, of course. They were wonderful when Doug was there, and they adored him. And they were beautiful even when he was not there; Lori had made breakfast and gotten Elizabeth off to school for weeks after Geoff left. She saw the shocked expression on Lori's face.

"I'm sorry," Casey said. "I didn't mean that."

"It's you, Mom, don't you know that yet? Why do you think Dad left? It wasn't because of me or Erin or Lizzy. We didn't want him to go. At least he still loves us. He took Lizzy this weekend, didn't he?"

"I said I was sorry," said Casey through her teeth. She felt eyes on her. "Lori, don't do this to me. Don't make a scene."

"Oh, right, Mom. That's all you ever worry about. That someone will think you're not a good mother."

Casey struggled for control.

"What are you going to do, hit me? Why don't you? Why don't you act just like Dad? Go ahead!"

Trembling, Casey raised her hand, as the waitress appeared at her elbow.

"Who ordered the Sprite?"

Lori lowered her head onto her arms.

"That's fine," said Casey with a strained smile. "Skip the coffee." She cleared her throat. "Could you tell me, please, where I might find the ladies' room?"

The restaurant had quieted, like the silence that follows some terrible explosion. She was sure that everyone was watching. Cups suspended in mid-sip, silverware glinted in the blaze from the hot panes. She pushed her chair back, rose unsteadily, and left the table.

She supported herself over the sink until her stomach stopped convulsing. When someone came in to use one of the stalls, Casey hastily reapplied her makeup and went back out into the hall.

She hesitated next to a wall telephone, listening to the reanimated din from the dining room. Her waitress passed by on her way to the kitchen. I must look like a fool, standing here, Casey thought. She busied herself with her purse, and her fingers closed around a loose coin at the bottom.

Reflexively she dropped it in the slot and dialed Doug's number.

When the operator came on the line,

she dug deeper into her purse. But she could not come up with the right change.

"Deposit eighty-five cents for the first three minutes."

Already the number was ringing; the operator would interrupt the connection until she paid, and in the meantime Doug might hang up. She could reverse the charges, couldn't she? He wouldn't mind. He had asked her to call en route and tell him that she was safe.

"Hello?" His voice.

"One moment, sir. Ma'am, will you please deposit - ?"

She hung up without speaking.

It was just as well. What could Doug do? He was a dear, kind man, sympathetic and eager to please - too eager, she thought. She was not sure she could trust that. At least Geoff had been forceful, decisive.

She retrieved her coin. Then, on an impulse, she searched her purse for her address book.

How could she have forgotten it?

It had been so long that she could not remember her parents' number. She opened the telephone directory and scanned the columns. Yes, this one would be a local call.

A synthesized voice informed her that the number she was dialing was no longer in service.

That was a mistake, obviously. She rang the operator, then directory assistance, but there was nothing else under their name. That meant they had switched to an unlisted number. Why? So that they would not be bothered by crank calls, she thought. Like this one.

Back at the table, Lori had not touched her half of the sandwich. Casey put a ten dollar bill down next to the check and left without waiting for the change.

She crossed the parking lot, got in and sat staring straight ahead at the bay and the huge outline of Morro Rock, now wreathed in shadows as the sun disappeared behind another fogbank. The sailboats listed between whitecaps and disappeared into darkness.

Lori slid over the back seat, dumping her magazines onto the floor. "Thanks, Mom," she said. "You don't have to be such a bitch, you know. It isn't my fault."

"I know."

But who then, she thought, can I blame?

On the way inland, Casey almost detoured by her parents' mobile home park. She realized that she had intended all along to stop there but had not admitted it to herself until now. But then she thought: Maybe they went south for the Olympics. Dad always was into sports. They didn't let me know they would be in L.A. because they didn't want to bother me, to impose.

If they had taken the coastal route, she had probably passed them on the highway and not even noticed.

They saw a sign pointing them to Lockwood shortly after the sun began to sink into the sea. As the mountains to the east grew dim and jagged, Lori gave up on her reading. The light was failing and the motion of the car as it crept higher made the words do an insect dance on the pages of her book. She decided not to look outside at all from now on; the foothills were no longer elephants dozing on their sides but a shadowy border that was darker than the twilight.

"Are we there yet?" she asked.

"That sign had better be right," said her mother. "I don't see any other road ..."

"Why don't you turn your lights on?" she said impatiently.

"I was about to do that," Casey did, and then there was a chain link fence ahead and another sign with the words: AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY - NO ADMITTANCE.

"Oh, great, Mom. Now what are we gonna do? Turn around and go back? It was a real good idea to send Erin to this place. Wasn't it?"

Casey gey out her glasses and rolled the window down. "I didn't send her here. She was the one who ran away. When they picked her up, I simply told them they could keep her for a while. Until she straightens out."

Lori did not answer. Her throat hurt and her eyes stung. It must have been the cool air. She rubbed her arms to make the goose bumps go away.

Her mother honked the horn and a man in jogging shoes came out. He looked like a camp counselor. When Casey told him who they were he started fooling with the padlock. He got the chain off and swung the gate open, and Casey drove through without even saying thank you.

The dirt road felt soft and shaky, as if there was an earthquake going on inside

the hills. Her mother had to hold the wheel tight to keep it from jerking out of her hands. After a while there was another gate, this one open, and yellow lights from a group of low buildings. The car nosed in, as the ground shook harder and began to rumble. Then a big light came on behind them, so strong that Mom had to look away from the mirror and put on the brakes.

A sound like an elephant's trumpet blasted them. It was so loud that Lori was afraid they were going to be trampled. Mom finally unfroze, yanked the wheel around and stepped on the gas. The car jumped to the side, leaves and branches clawing at the top, and rolled to a stop between some trees, as a bus like the one that took Lori to school tore up the road and bounced through the gate. Lori heard kids yelling.

"Hey, are you all right?"

A girl who was old enough to be in college came running over. She was wearing a red-white-and-blue T-shirt. She tried to open the car door, but the button was down.

"Gee, I'm real sorry 'bout that! Everybody went on a field trip today and, well, the kids are pretty excited. The driver was in a hurry. He must have had it up to here with them by now."

"You really should do something about that road," said Casey, taking off her glasses and touching her hair. "Now, can you please tell me where I might find Erin?"

"Who?"

"I'm Erin's mother. I called yesterday. It's arranged."

The young woman leaned in to get a better look at Casey. "Is she one of the older girls?"

Casey fixed her with a steely gaze. "She's thirteen." She said it as if she thought she had been insulted.

It was always the way. First she was too polite, then something made her turn cold and hard. She did that with everyone lately, though sometimes with men she didn't bother to start off nice. Lori couldn't figure out what the trouble was this time. She forgot about Mom and sat forward.

"Hi! Erin's my sister. We came to get her."

"To visit," Casey corrected.

"Well, hi, yourself," said the counselor. "I didn't see you back there. Are you okay, too?"

Lori pulled up the button on her door and felt herself being helped out. When the other counselor, the one from down below, got there and tried to help Mom, she slid out quickly and took Lori by the hand.

"Stay with me," she said.

"You want me to take a look at that front end?" he said. "You just might have yourself a bent tie-rod there."

"I'll take care of it, thank you," said Casey.

By the time they got onto the grounds the bus was already unloading. Lori and her mother watched the children climb down, but they did not see Erin. Other counselors got off and counted heads. One blew a whistle to get the kids lined up.

"Did you say all the children are on this bus?" Casey asked the young woman.

"Don't you see her?"

"She should be," said the young man.

"Listen to me," said Casey. "We've come a long way. It's late. If you people don't mind, I'd like to see my daughter - now."

The counselors conferred over a clipboard.

"I'm sorry," said the young woman, "but I can't find any Erin on this list."

"That means she's on the other bus," said the young man.

"What other bus?"

"Is she a Special Child?"

"Let me talk to your Supervisor," said Casey.

"The Officer of the Day, you mean?"

The young woman shifted her weight from one jogging shoe to the other and peered at her wristwatch. "That might be a bit of a problem. See, the rest of the staff's supposed to be on dinner break. The next shift doesn't come on till eight o'clock."

"Do you mean to tell me that there's no one in charge here?"

"The O.D.? Let me see..."

"In the dining hall," said the young man.

"Well, I guess I could page him for you, if it's an emergency. Otherwise, if you can wait a few minutes..."

"Is that the other bus?" said Lori.

They turned as another big yellow-sided school transport barrelled to a halt in front.

The first child limped and had hands that dangled strangely from his wrists. The second drooled and took a long time. Lori noticed that there was something wrong with every one who got off the bus,

like twisted legs or curved backs or heads that wouldn't move right.

"What kind of facility is this?" said Casey.

"Oh, we're DPSS," said the young man. He stepped forward to assist with the wheelchair cases. "We're supposed to be strictly Protective Custody and Placement. But since the Governor cut the Social Services budget we get a lot of Disabled, Drug Rehab, the overflow from Juvie, you name it. They'd better not send us any more. We're already sleeping six to a room."

"My Erin's not one of these," Casey told him.

"You never know," he said.

Last off were three squat, overweight, moon-faced kids. They held hands and laughed and stuck out their long tongues at each other, as happy as babies. Lori smiled at them and waved. It wouldn't be so bad to be a Special Child, she thought. In some ways they're better off. They get to have fun all the time. They don't have any worries.

"Well?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Ma'am? You don't see her?" When Mom pursed her lips at him and jutted out her jaw he said, "Let me check the Pop Sheet. There's a bench back by the office, if you'd like to sit down." He started away, then had another idea. "Why don't you join us for dinner? I'll ask the kitchen to make up a couple of extra plates."

"No, thank you."

"Mom..." said Lori when he had gone.

"You hush," said Casey. "We don't need any favours from him."

Lori brooded, her stomach growling. "What did you mean when you said we only came to visit?"

"What?"

"I said we came to get Erin, and you said --"

Casey sighed. "I'm trying to decide what would be best for her. It's not easy."

"What's best for you, you mean."

Before her mother could say anything else, Lori left her and walked over to the playing field and sat in one of the swings.

This was the time of day she liked best, with the noisy hours past, the dust settled, the air clear. Above the trees the sky was the colour of a deep ocean, and the evening star was showing on the horizon. Venus, she remembered from her book.

All the anger and resentment, built up inside her during the endless ride, left her like a long breath and blew away with the breeze that moved through the trees. For now she was empty and alone. She saw the outline of the playground equipment nearby, things she had left behind on the last day of school. She was surprised at how small they seemed to her, and wondered how such childish toys had ever supported her weight.

The breeze grew stronger, singing in the chains of the swing. She held them taut but they still vibrated in her fingers. They began to rattle. She could not stop them.

It was not the breeze, she realised. She was not alone. There was something loose in the ground, and it was running out all around her.

She looked at the long shadows growing by the slide and the merry-go-round and the jungle gym. Were they moving?

She saw her mother waiting in a pool of yellow light outside the chickenwire glass of the office. The rumbling was spreading, moving closer. Couldn't her mother hear it?

Then Lori saw the bobbing silhouette of a runner, arms and legs pumping spasmodically like the angled appendages of a monstrous spider. He passed the walkway and was lost again in the darkness.

Lori stood uncertainly, the links icy in her hands.

"Forty-two, forty-three, fifty-seven, ninety-nine..."

"Hello?" she said. "Is anybody there?"

"Got to keep count," he called above the thumping rhythm. "Did I break the record?"

"I -- I don't know."

His silhouette passed closer as he circled the field, perilously near the tetherball pole. If his foot struck it he would lose his balance and go sprawling, probably straight into the monkey bars. It was too dark for running. Didn't he know that?

"Who are you?" she asked.

"I'm the 1500 meter. What are you?"

"I'm not anything," said Lori. "Why are you doing that?"

"Got to practise."

"You better be careful. It's getting pretty dark."

"Not me. I know the way perfect. Even at night. What's your name?"

"Lori. What's yours?"

The thumping slowed. She heard a panting close by. Then a teenage boy was standing before her. He held his chin down as he gasped for breath, his chest heaving.

"I won," he said. "My best time."

"That's nice," she said. She saw his skinny bare arms glistening with perspiration, his oddly bent hands. "Um, for what?"

"For the Olympics," he said. He collapsed into the swing next to hers. "I went to the Fair. I didn't get to practise. Did you go to the Fair?"

"Me? I just got here."

"From the Fair?"

"From Los Angeles."

"Is that far away?"

"I guess so."

"No, it's not. I saw you before. You live in Green Cottage."

What was wrong with him? She changed the subject. "Why are you practising for the 1500 meter? That's over already. It was today."

"Next Saturday," he said, swinging slowly. "I'm sixteen. Are you?"

She laughed. "No, silly."

As her eyes adjusted she made out the logo on his sweat-soaked shirt. It was the same red-white-and-blue design she saw everywhere, except that this had one word that was different. Like the counselors' shirts. At last she understood. *SPECIAL Olympics*. For the handicapped. She had seen a TV movie about it once. She smiled broadly.

"That's great," she told him, "really great. You'll win, I know. You're a good runner."

"I can run faster than anybody. I get the medal."

"I bet you do." She saw his hairy legs sticking out, his knobby knees, his worn tennis shoes with cartoon characters on the laces. She liked him very much. "I know who you saw," she said. "It was my sister. We sort of look alike. Where's Green Cottage?"

He pointed to the corner bungalow. "If you get lost, wait where you are. Miss Shelby will take you back to your room. Don't wander around after lights out, and no TV after ten o'clock."

Lori's mother heard the conversation and came over. "Who are you talking to out here?" she said.

"Um, a friend."

"What's your friend's name?"

"Did you see me?" he said. "I got the medal."

"Next Saturday," said Lori. "I wish I could be there."
 "You will be," he said. "Next Saturday. Yesterday."

"Has the whole world gone crazy?" said Casey.

"Didn't they find Erin?" Lori asked her.

"They don't know anything. They said they were going to look for her, but I don't believe it. I don't believe anything anymore. They don't care if Erin's run off again."

"Is that what they said?"

"They don't have to. I should have known. It's something she learned from her father."

"I know where she is," said Lori.
 "Wait one minute."

"I'm tired of waiting," said Casey.
 "I'm not going to wait for anyone, ever again."

"No, really. Sit right here."
 "Why should I? Where are you going?"
 "I'll be right back, I promise. Talk to him, Mom. He's nice. Really."

Lori left the swings and hurried across the field.

Most of the bungalows were empty now for dinner, but the lights had been left on. Through the windows she saw that some rooms were strung with crepe paper daisy chains and watercolour paintings, others with pictures of baby animals or rock stars. The ones with heavy metal posters, she knew, belonged to the boys.

Inside a dayroom, several girls her own age lounged on sofas and chairs, staring listlessly at a television set. They had already changed into their bathrobes and fuzzy slippers and were settling in for an evening of MTV. But of course Erin was not among them. This was not her building.

As she cut across to the corner bungalow, Lori looked back and saw her mother sitting resignedly in the swing next to the boy from the Special Olympics. From here she couldn't tell if they were talking. She hoped so.

Green Cottage was darker than the others. The older girls had covered their windows with rainbow stickers and tissue paper arranged in stained glass patterns. Lori managed to see into at least part of every room. With so many record album covers scattered over beds and the piles of underwear collecting in corners, they reminded her of Erin's room at home. But Erin was not in any of these, nor in the

dayroom at the end.

She stood outside, her own face reflected in the glass. It was easy to imagine herself living here. She wanted her own room to have unicorns and stuffed animals and coloured lampshades, too. After a while all the Green Cottage girls returned and were accounted for except Erin. When no one noticed Lori and invited her in she moved on, dejected.

How could she tell Mom?

On her way back to the field, she saw the young counselor who had tried to help Mom out of the car. He was coming this way. He had a jaunty way of walking that made her feel good. With each step the keys around his neck jingled like music.

"Hi," she said.

"What are you doing out of your room?"

"I don't have one."

"What's your colour? You're in Green Cottage, aren't you?"

"Yes, I mean, no, I mean, I'm not really here. It's my sister. Don't you remember me? I came here with my mother to --"

"Oh, yeah. How're you doing? Did you find that sister of yours?"

"No. Did you?"

"Me? I thought Lissa was going to track her down. Well, she'll turn up. They always do. Tell your mom not to worry."

He started away.

"Hey, where's your mom now?"

"Over there, I think." She tipped her head to the darkness.

"What's she going to do about that tie-rod? I can give her the number of the garage in town, if she wants. Does she have the Auto Club?"

"Um, I'll ask."

It was too dark now to make out anything from the edge of the field. As she drew closer she heard the Olympic runner's flat-footed gait start up again. He couldn't stop practising.

Had they made friends yet? Even if they had, Lori should come up with something to say to keep her mother from getting too depressed. When she was little Mom had done that for her, reading her stories so that she would not be afraid. And now Lori would do the same for her. She hoped it would help.

She tried to think of something interesting from *The Book of Uncommon Knowledge*. The divorce rate, for example. It was fifty-one point seven per cent now. Did Mom know that? She probably did. How

about the one that said your hair and skin keep on growing after you die? If that was true, she thought, how could you ever know whether anyone was dead or alive? How long would it take to be sure?

"Mom?"

She let the footsteps pass once before she left the path, moving cautiously until the swings were lined up against the office on the other side. They were empty, but one set of chains was moving. Had Mom been sitting in that one?

At that moment the sound of running feet, magnified into a heartbeat between the buildings, was interrupted suddenly by a dull thud, followed by the ringing slap of flesh against steel. Lori had a mental picture of a wild horse tripped and brought to its knees, the way they did it in cowboy movies. Then there was a kicking and thrashing and a terrible high-pitched wail.

"Mom?"

Lori rushed in, her own heart drumming in her ears.

Somebody in the office heard, too, because the outside lights went on. And she saw.

The runner lay crumpled on the ground near the monkey bars, clutching one leg. A piece of bone stuck out below the kneecap. His face was twisted in pain and his mouth was open. Lori's mother was bending over him.

"Mom, what are you doing?"

Casey looked up. Her eyes were wild. She recognised Lori and stopped her fists. She lowered her hands and sat back, blinking at them as if they were

someone else's, and pressed them to her face. When she took them down her expression was the same flat mask as always.

"It's all right now," she said. Her face. When she took them down her expression was the same flat mask as always could no longer control it.

Lori went to the boy. "What happened? Are you hurt bad?"

"Bad..." he blubbered, his tears falling like dew on the grass. "T-t-tripped..."

Lori turned on her mother. "What did you do?"

"I asked him to help me find Erin," Casey said. "And he started to run. That's all any of them know how to do. They can't wait to get away. But that's all over. Come with me now, baby."

"No, Mom, you're wrong! I'm not your baby anymore." Lori began to cry. It was the first time since Dad left. "Don't you understand?" she sobbed. "We're not going anywhere!"

Some of the counselors came out and tended the boy, as Lori's mother told them a story about what had happened. They nodded solemnly. No one argued with her. How could they? It was her word against the boy's. But Mom told the story again just to be sure. As she walked away with them, her feet made a funny zigzag pattern on the ground, as if she did not know where she was going.

Lori waited in the dark, on the grass, crying and crying. Now that she had started she was afraid she would never stop. And that she would never know.

Best known for his short stories and pseudonymously-written film novelisations, Dennis Etchison is in the vanguard of modern approaches to horror fiction. Aside from numerous, highly individual stories, Dennis has recently turned to editing anthologies, with *Masters of Darkness* (Tor Books) and *Cutting Edge* (Doubleday) both appearing this year (with follow-up volumes due in 1987). A novel, *Darkside*, has just been published by Charter Books, and a third collection is still due from Scream/Press to accompany his previous volumes, *The Dark Country* and *Red Dreams*. In fact, Scream/Press is to redesign and reissue these latter two books to match the format of the new volume. A French edition of *The Dark Country* (*Les Domaines de la Nuit*) was published by Nouvelle Editions Opta in their Galaxie/Bis series and Futura is set to publish a number of his works in the U.K. He was recently a staff writer for the HBO cable television series *The Hitchhiker* and he is currently putting the finishing touches to his script for John Carpenter's *Halloween IV*, due to start filming in April. Short work has turned up in *Night Cry* (an excerpt from the novel) and Karl Edward Wagner's *The Year's Best Horror Stories: XIV* (*The Woman in Black*, originally scheduled to appear in *Fantasy Tales*). With *The Olympic Runner*, we are happy to present a major new story by Dennis Etchison that has all the qualities of keenly observed character and unsettling fears we have come to expect from this acclaimed horror stylist.

Manly Wade Wellman

By KARL EDWARD WAGNER

SOME of you reading this will have met and known Manly Wade Wellman. Others, maybe you just knew him through his many books and short stories. Whatever your contact, we were all of us richer for it, just as we're poorer by his loss.

Manly Wade Wellman was born on May 21, 1903 in the village of Kamundongo in Portuguese West Africa. Today that's known as Angola. For some reason his year of birth is often given as 1904 - an error that always made Manly mad, as he lived every one of his nearly 83 years to the fullest. His father was a medical missionary, and some of Manly's memories of his African childhood sounded like chapters out of H. Rider Haggard's novels. Maybe it was fitting that his final book, *Caheena*, finished just before his crippling fall of last June, is a novel of 7th Century North Africa.

Manly twice visited London as a small child, when his father was on leave from his duties in Africa. One of the awesome characteristics about Manly was his long-term memory - as close to qualifying as a 'photographic memory' as I've ever encountered. He talked about learning to walk in Torrington Square and recited rhymes his nanny told him there. He remembered a procession in which England's King and two future Kings were riding together.

I was never quite sure which Manly loved more - England or the American South. I doubt if he could have given a straight answer. He wouldn't return to England for nearly 70 years - until 1975 when we all went over as part of some tour package. Torrington Square had taken a few hits during the Battle of Britain, and was obliterated by later development; there were a few trees, a bombed out church, and a rusting iron plaque that Manly found by instinct a few blocks from our hotel. No matter, Manly had a host of new friends awaiting him in London - some of them writers and editors he'd corresponded with: Ramsey Campbell, Michel Parry, Christopher Priest, Piers Dudgeon, Leslie Flood (who was to be our European agent). Other friends were new ones: Writers, fans, many times just folks he met in pubs.

The only thing that made a greater impression on Manly than English pubs was Stonehenge. It was eleven years ago that he first visited Stonehenge, in a crowded tour bus filled with the usual Ugly American tourists. No matter the hordes of polyester pant-suits, Hawaiian shirts and cameras - nothing could have reduced the awe with which Manly strolled about Stonehenge. He made a point of going back every time he returned to England. It was a pilgrimage that shows through in half the books he wrote afterward.

Manly loved the North Carolina mountains, particularly those in rugged Madison County, and his John stories reflect this deep love for the region and its people. It had to end. Everything does. A broken hip in 1976 put an end to Manly's trips to the mountains. But it didn't put an end to his writing.

The end really came last June, with a fall that shattered his shoulder and elbow. The decline was slow but inevitable. Manly's mind was as sharp as ever, and he enjoyed hearing from friends. But his strength was failing. He wanted to get back to writing but he was too weak to work at his desk.

April 5, 1986 was a glorious Spring day in Chapel Hill, with dogwoods and azaleas just coming into bloom. We gave Manly a spoonful of cough syrup at 2 p.m. I watched him to see that he didn't choke on it, then told him I'd bring a shot of Jack Daniel's to wash it down. Manly said, "That'll be good." I looked back as I left the bedroom, saw his head slump onto his chest. His heart had stopped.

He went out with the taste of mountain moonshine and the promise of a drink of Jack Daniel's. Manly would have written it like that. I reckon he got that drink. But not from me. Maybe from Wade Hampton, who told Manly the news about how General Grant had surrendered to Robert E. Lee...



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The White Road

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

Illustration by LEE BROWN COYE

THE desert is dun at the noon of day
And sable at noon of night;
At dawn and at dusk it is silver-gray,
But the caravan route is white.
*Across the sand
Like a pallid band,
The caravan route is white.*

The traveler's face is drawn and pale
And he prays beneath his breath;
For the bones of Dead Things fill the trail
Like the road to the gates of Death.
*Instead of stones
It is paved with bones,
Like the road to the gates of Death.*

The men of Egypt, the men of Rome,
The men of many a land
Lay down to die far away from home
On the road through the weary sand.
*They died, and each
Left his bones to bleach
On the road through the weary sand,*

Men turn from the path when daylight dies;
For after the sun is set
The ghosts of the Dead Things stir and rise
To travel the roadway yet.
*Dead beasts and men
Are alive again,
To travel the roadway yet.*

The desert is dun at the noon of day
And sable at noon of night;
At dawn and at dusk it is silver-gray,
But the caravan route is white.
*The silent dead
Build a road of dread -
The caravan route is white!*



"But I'm not finished," the man cried."

Red

By RICHARD CHRISTIAN MATHESON

Illustration by ALLEN KOSZOWSKI

HE KEPT walking. The day was hot and miserable and he wiped his forehead. Up another twenty feet, he could make out more. Thank God. Maybe he'd find it all. He picked up the pace and his breathing got thick. He struggled on, remembering his vow to himself to go through with this, not to stop until he was done. Maybe it had been a mistake to ask this favour. But it was the only way he could think of to work it out. Still, maybe it had been a mistake.

He felt an edge to his stomach as he stopped and leaned down to what was at his feet. He grimaced, lifted it into the large canvas bag he carried, wiped his hands, and moved on. The added weight in

the bag promised more, and he somehow felt better. He had found most of what he was looking for in the first mile. Only a half mile more to go, to convince himself; to be sure.

To not go insane.

It was a nightmare for him to realise how far he'd gone this morning with no suspicion, no clue. He held the bag more tightly and walked on. Ahead, the forms who waited got bigger; closer. They stood with arms crossed, people gathered and complaining behind them. They would have to wait.

He saw something a few yards up, swallowed, and walked closer. It was everywhere and he shut his eyes, trying not to see how it must have been. But he saw it all.

Heard it in his head. The sounds were horrible and he couldn't make them go away. Nothing would go away, until he had everything, he was certain of that. Then his mind would at last have some chance to find a place of comfort. To go on.

He bent down and picked up what he could, then walked on, scanning ahead. The sun was beating down and he felt his shirt soaking with sweat under the arms and on his back. He was nearing the forms who waited when he stopped, seeing something halfway between himself and them. It had lost its shape, but he knew what it was and couldn't step any closer. He placed the bag down and slowly sat cross-legged on the baking ground, staring. His body began to shake.

A somber-looking man walked to him and carefully picked up the object, placing it in the canvas bag and cinching the top. He gently coaxed the weeping man to stand and the man nodded through tears. Together, they walked toward the others who were glancing at watches and losing patience.

"But I'm not finished," the man cried. His voice broke and his eyes grew hot and puffy. "Please...I'll go crazy...just a little longer?"

The somber-looking man hated what was

happening. He made the decision. "I'm sorry, sir. Headquarters said I could only give you the half-hour you asked for. That's all I can do. It's a very busy road."

The man tried to struggle away but was held more tightly. He began to scream and plead.

Two middle-aged women who were waiting watched uncomfortably.

"Whoever allowed this should be reported," said one, shaking her head critically. "The poor man is ready to have a nervous breakdown. It's cruel."

The other said she'd heard they felt awful for the man, whose little girl had grabbed on to the back bumper of his car when he'd left for work that morning. The girl had gotten caught and he'd never known.

They watched the officer approaching with the crying man whom he helped into the hot squad car. Then the officer grabbed the canvas bag, and as it began to slip red onto the blacktop, he gently placed it into the trunk beside the mangled tricycle.

The backed-up traffic began to honk, and traffic was waved on as the man was driven away.

At the age of 33, Richard Christian Matheson is something of a quiet phenomenon. The son of genre giant Richard Matheson, over the past decade he has written scripts for more than 250 television shows as diverse as *Knight Rider*, *The Incredible Hulk* and *Three's Company*. He has served as the story editor on *The A-Team*, *Hardcastle & McCormick*, *Quincy* and *Hunter*, and recently produced and wrote the CBS-TV series *Stir Crazy*. His (often very short) fiction has appeared in such magazines and anthologies as *Whispers*, *Rod Serling's The Twilight Zone*, *Night Cry*, *Gallery*, *Shadows*, *Dark Forces* and *Cutting Edge*, while a collection titled *Scare and Other Distinguishing Marks* has recently appeared from *Scream/Press*. His latest project is a film script currently being produced by Steven Spielberg. *Red* originally appeared in the Summer 1986 issue of *Night Cry*.





"Using all his strength, he raised The Singing Stone..."

The Singing Stone

By PETER TREMAYNE

Illustration by ALAN HUNTER

PROFESSOR Laouig Guezennec was cursed from the moment he discovered 'The Singing Stone'. He did not know it then, of course; he did not know it until forty years after his discovery. Indeed, it might be that he never ever knew it. Let us hope not for that would be a small mercy to the man.

I was not with him on the occasion of that discovery. I was not even born when Guezennec found the stone which was said to be the most important archaeological find in the field of Celtic antiquities since the discovery of the *Calendrier de Coligny*, one of the earliest written remains in a Celtic language.

Guezennec had discovered the stone on his thirty-first birthday when he was excavating a section of the great stone complex at Carnac. It was an odd stone; perhaps eighteen inches long and oviformed, rather like an egg. At its widest point it measured about a foot across. Towards its tapering end, the stone was cut into irregular grooves while, over its broad face, were a series of typical Celtic spirals winding themselves into incredible patterns.

There was no question that the stone had a purpose, a function, for the ancient Celts were not given to making useless artifacts - even the most decorative objects had a functional use. But what purpose? What use? It came to be known as *An Men Kanan* - 'The Singing Stone' - because when a draught or a wind breathed across its surface, it emitted a strange musical, whistling sound. It was thought that it was the way the grooves channelled the wind, rather like the noise produced by blowing across the neck of an open nottle. The purpose behind this stone intrigued young Guezennec; over the years he devoted himself to seeking that purpose. He became convinced that the stone was a key to something - of what he was not sure. The years slipped away and *An Men Kanan* remained a mystery and was given

pride of place in the small university museum in Rennes.

I came to know Laouig Guezennec when he was professor of the Celtic studies department at Rennes. I was in my final year there as a student and wondering what I should do once I had obtained my degree. My family, a farming family from Douarnenez, had always considered it a waste of time for me to study the ancient civilization of the Celtic peoples from which they had descended. They were of a generation which accepted the French teaching that the Bretons were awkward provincials who sometimes gibbered in an outlandish *patois* and were, as Balzac once proclaimed in his novel *The Chouan*, illiterate savages who were no better than the American Red Indians.

In my estimation, I was proud to be compared to the American Indians for we, in Brittany, like our Indian brothers, were once a proud people, an independent people, speaking a language which was ancient and cultured long before the turbulent Franks began to sweep westward to over-run the land they now call by their name. We Bretons speak a language that is closely akin to the Welsh and to the Cornish, a sister language to Irish, Manx and Scottish Gaelic. We were once a great sea power, as Julius Caesar learned to his cost; a great trading power until the envious Frankish rulers turned their eyes upon our land, crushing our complete independence in the 16th Century. Nevertheless, we remained a proud, autonomous state within the French kingdom until the new French republic overthrew our parliament in 1793 and forcibly annexed Brittany to France.

Alas, you must forgive me my moment of Celtic lamentation. A proud, ancient people, reduced to gawky provincialism!

In my time at Rennes I had the privilege to attend several lectures given by Laouig Guezennec. He had the ability to make our ancient civilization come

alive; endowed as he was with a fierce enthusiasm for the subject, his lectures were eagerly attended. Yet only in the lecture room did Guezennec appear to come alive. He was a tall, thin, austere-looking man with a permanent solemnity, enhanced by lustreless grey eyes and a nervous habit of glancing over his shoulder every so often as if searching for some invisible eavesdropper. His gaunt, white face, his nervous mannerisms, gave the impression of a man who was haunted by his past, or by some unfulfilled ambition that was worrying him to the point of insanity. In spite of an inability to make friends among his students, or members of the faculty, Guezennec was highly regarded for his work. It was with some pride, therefore, that I received an invitation to accompany a group of his best students on an archaeological 'dig'.

Guezennec was conducting an excavation on the Ile d'Queasant. It is the most westerly of the Breton islands laying twenty-five kilometres into the grey Atlantic from Le Conquet, which guards the mouth of the channel to the harbour of Brest. It is a small island, slightly humped back, a few kilometres square with a village, Lampaul, resting in a southern aspected bay, a lighthouse to the west and little else. Encircling that hammock of an island stretches a restless, brooding coastline. The sea is everywhere, omnipresent, gnawing and pounding at the rocky, grey coves, relentlessly licking at the shore. The tang of salt and brine is inescapable; wherever you go on the island you can not fail to be aware of the sea; aware of its menacing power.

In the north of the island is a low, flat-topped hill, dominated by a ten foot high menhir; a tall standing stone of black-grey granite. Strange how many people use the word menhir without being aware that it comes from Breton - *men* meaning 'stone' and *hir* being 'long'. It was this flat topped area which Guezennec was excavating. He had explained before we started that he believed the site to have been central to the ancient Celtic world; the site stood at certain geometrical angles to the intricate complex at Avebury, in England; to Carnac in our own Brittany; to the mystical Tara in Ireland, and to other sites in Scotland, Wales and Cornwall. Previous work on the site had revealed a series of stones which had either fallen and been buried, or signs where they had simply been

carried away to be broken up for local building material. Our work now concentrated on the centre of the circle.

I recall that Friday very well. It was nearly lunchtime and I and my fellow diggers were feeling the nearness of the hour. Then a fair-haired youth struck something with his trowel. Guezennec, his face expressionless, ordered everyone to dig carefully at the spot. By late afternoon we stood in barely controlled excitable silence before a great black altar stone.

It was three feet wide and seven feet long and lay resting on rounded standing stones which supported each of its four corners.

Scrapers and brushes to the fore, we painstakingly began to clean the details of that altar until the stone stood revealed like the black sheen of polished cast-iron. It had a curious border; a carved border of loops and spirals which were immediately recognisable as Celtic symbolism; so mystical, so indecipherable. Then came, from each corner, four lines running towards the centre at which was carved several grooves. Just below this was a series of marks consisting of short lines drawn to and crossing a base line.

I was a little proud that I recognised them first.

"Look, professor!" I cried. "Surely this is an Ogham inscription?"

Guezennec examined them closely and nodded slowly.

There was a little gasp of astonishment from my fellow workers. Ogham was the first written form of the Irish language and not more than 363 inscriptions have so far been found; 315 in Ireland itself; with 48 in Wales and England, of which six were in Cornwall. The inscriptions were said to have been made by Irish missionaries and, to my knowledge, no Ogham inscription had ever been found in Brittany.

"What does it say?" I prompted, watching Guezennec as he peered at the inscription. He seemed to be staring at it like a man possessed for his lips trembled in excitement, red dashed his cheeks and his hands were jerking. It was the first time that I had ever seen the old professor animated.

"There are only two words there," he finally said, after a very long pause. "The words 'world' and 'key'."

Everyone voiced their puzzlement, for Ogham inscriptions consist almost entirely

of proper names in the genitive case. What did this abrasive inscription mean? We waited, perhaps a little impatiently, while the old professor stared down at the altar stone, running his frail, thin hands over the spirals and in the carved grooves in the centre of its black surface. He turned to face our eager gaze.

"You have made an exceptional find today, my friends," he said, forcing a smile. "Today is Friday. I say you deserve a weekend of relaxation. We will pack up for the weekend, my friends."

Many faces were filled with disappointment and one or two muttered protests. It had been expected that Guezennec would have made some pronouncement on our discovery.

"When you come back on Monday I shall have an explanation for you," the professor assured us. "I need time for reflection."

With some reluctance the members of our archaeological team began to pack their tools and wander back to Lampaul in groups of twos or threes. The prospect of a free weekend was gradually taking the place of their disappointment. A few of my fellow students suggested catching the ferry to spend the weekend in Brest but I did not feel like accompanying them. I was content on the island and resolved to spend the weekend fishing. I was lodging with a homely couple called Solliec. Yann, the husband, was a local fisherman who had promised to take me out in his boat when I found time. His wife was a big, gaunt-faced woman, who had the reputation of being the local wise-woman. She had a pale, almost white skin, roughened by exposure to the elements. Her eyes were of a piercing green and her hair was the colour of jet. I always had the uncomfortable impression that she could read my mind.

I had finished packing my bag and was following my colleagues when Guezennec called me back.

"A word with you, Bihanig," he said.

I turned respectfully.

"Yes, professor?"

To my surprise, the old professor was smiling, an almost genial smile creasing his usually sombre features. To my even greater surprise he turned and linked his arm in mine.

"You are a first class pupil, Bihanig," he began.

I swallowed proudly.

"Thank you, professor..."

He gestured me to silence.

"I would like you to stay and help me this weekend, Bihanig," he nodded towards my disappearing comrades. "We don't need them at this time. But I need the help of a good man. I need your youth, your strength."

I felt a ridiculous pride that he should enlist my aid.

"Naturally, professor," I said.

"You see, Bihanig," he went on, not interested in my reaction, "I believe that I have finally discovered the meaning of *An Men Karan!*"

I gaped at him.

Since its discovery, the mystery of the stone had become almost legendary among Celtic scholars; the subject of many a learned discourse. It was generally thought that it would be one of history's eternal mysteries.

"I have searched many years, Bihanig. Now I stand on the verge of discovery after a lifetime of wishing."

I gazed at him with eagerness in my eyes.

"Why, that would be the greatest discovery in the field of Celtic studies since the Gundestrup cauldron was found," I breathed. The cauldron, found in Denmark, dated from the 1st Century BC and its elaborate workmanship in silver and gilt depicting scenes from Celtic history and mythology was priceless.

"Much more important than that," the professor contradicted.

I frowned, not being able to envisage anything more important.

He smiled indulgently.

"It will be the greatest discovery of mankind."

My jaw hung open.

"No, I am not mad, young friend," he said.

I gestured uncertainly, as if to reassure him that such a thought was far from my mind but he did not appear to notice.

"I have long asserted that 'The Singing Stone' is a key, have I not?"

"Yes, professor."

"The stone is the key to the meaning of the universe; the key to life itself. And now I think I have found the door."

Key? He gave such emphasis to the word. Key! Of course! Key! World! My mind worked rapidly.

"You mean that the stone, 'The Singing Stone', fits into those grooves in this altar slab?"

Guezennec smiled broadly.

"My estimation of you was not incorrect, Bihanig. That is precisely what I mean. It is my belief that the stone, once fitted into the grooves on the altar slab, will unlock the meaning of the universe."

That was the second time the old professor had used such grandiloquent language and I must confess that I thought his excitement was getting the better of him. He saw my glance and sighed impatiently.

"Come," he said, turning away from the site. "I will walk with you to the village and I will explain things as we go." He paused to light his old briar pipe before we continued. "Let me take you through each step, Bihanig. Most scholars acknowledge that the ancient Celts were a very advanced civilization...that is if we measure civilization by knowledge and the understanding of nature and not simply by our technical ability to destroy or conquer Nature and dominate our fellow man. Cicero paid special tribute to the Celtic druids as great natural scientists whose command of physics and astronomy he found most remarkable. Aristotle, Sotion and Clement have all gone on record to acknowledge that early Greek philosophers and scientists borrowed much from the druids. We know that it was the Celtic religion which was the first European one to evolve a doctrine of immortality."

I was a trifle impatient.

"I know this," professor. It is elementary knowledge to anyone who has studied as I have."

"Very well, then, Bihanig," he said.

"A little patience, please. We will start our premise on the fact that in the ancient Celts we are dealing with a people who were possessed of a vast natural knowledge, an understanding of things material and metaphysical, a knowledge of the many mysteries of the universe. Even now, in deciphering their ancient stone circles and complexes we are only just beginning to acknowledge their tremendous awareness of mathematics and astronomy."

"That is so," I conceded.

"Place that firmly in your mind," he ordered. "Now let us turn to more recent times. We all know the Celtic myth of King Arthur, a Cornish ruler fighting for the freedom of his people against the invasion of the English in the 6th Century.

We know also of the myth of the Holy Grail."

"The Holy Grail?" I pursed my lips in disapproval. "That is a medieval Christian myth which was grafted on to the old Arthurian tale at a much later date."

Guezennec shook his head in disagreement.

"Not so, Bihanig. The quest for a magical vessel goes back many hundreds of years before the Christian period. You must read the Welsh tale *The Spoils of Annwyn*. In ancient Irish, Welsh and Breton manuscripts you will find such tales, also in Manx and Scottish folklore and even in a fragmentary eighth Century Cornish manuscript, there is a similar tale of the feverish search for an object which was variously called 'The Mystery' which represented the key of universal knowledge. Only in later years was the tale retold with Christian symbolism and came down to us as the quest for the Holy Grail."

He paused to relight his pipe.

"I believe, Bihanig, that all those stories centre round an object which the ancient druid priesthood mislaid or purposely hid thousands of years ago. For thousands of years people have searched for that ancient mystery, not finding it until I, Laouig Guezennec found it at Carnac."

I turned to stare at him. His face was earnest, sincere, his eyes flickered with a curious animation.

We had come to the gateway of the Sollec's flint-faced cottage in Lampaul and I stood, hand on the gate, regarding the old professor with a sceptical attitude.

"How can a stone be a key?" I demanded.

"And if it is a key, what does it unlock?"

Guezennec controlled a look of annoyance and knocked out his pipe against the gate post.

"What is the basis of the ancient Celtic religion, my young friend?" he asked softly.

"It was a Nature religion," I replied.

He shook his head impatiently.

"The doctrine of immortality," he said angrily. "Think, Bihanig!"

I shrugged.

"You mean reincarnation? The druids taught that death was only a changing of place. They believed in two parallel worlds. They taught that life goes on with all its forms and goods in another world - the Otherworld, it was referred to. When a person died in this world,

they were reborn in this. Thus a constant exchange of souls took place between the two worlds."

Guezennec nodded emphatically.

"And what, Bihanig, if the ancients, with all their acclaimed knowledge, knowledge of the physical and metaphysical, of astronomy and astrology, had found a key which opened a passage between the two worlds, without waiting for death?"

His hand gripped my arm with a fierce pressure.

I stared at him, wondering if he had taken leave of his senses.

"You are pre-supposing that the ancient religion preached a truth? You are saying that the Otherworld exists?"

He caught the note of cynicism in my voice and let his grip slacken.

"Tomorrow morning, Bihanig, you will witness the proof. Before I began my excavation on this island, I had uncovered enough references to the site in the ancient manuscripts to give a clear indication of the existence of the altar. I removed 'The Singing Stone' from the university museum and brought it with me. Tomorrow morning I shall place the stone in the altar piece where it belongs. We will be the first to tread the passage between the two worlds!"

He turned abruptly on his heel and left me staring after him in amazement.

That evening I found myself preoccupied. Laouig Guezennec was a brilliant scholar. But had a lifetime of searching for a meaning to *An Men Kanan* made him mad? A path between two worlds - a passage to the fabled Celtic Otherworld? What nonsense was this?

Madame Sollicec noticed my pensive abstraction and remarked on it.

How could I explain it to her? I merely said that I was preoccupied with my work at the site.

"I do not hold with digging in the sacred places," she said, her eyes narrowing. "No good comes to those who profane the ancient sites."

I wondered whether she had the power to read my thoughts. I smiled inwardly. I was getting as superstitious as the other islanders...as superstitious as Guezennec, come to that. I excused myself and turned in early that night.

It was not long after dawn when Laouig Guezennec came by the cottage. He carried a haversack which appeared to be heavily laden. I did not need to ask what he

carried inside it.

Madame Sollicec watched us go with a curious look in her eyes.

"It is a bad place, the hill of the menhir," she said, jerking her head towards the site. "One should not meddle with the old and sacred places."

Guezennec pretended not to hear her while I turned with some sort of patronising reply framed on my lips. But her deep green eyes staring into mine made me falter and drop my gaze like a little boy caught stealing sweets. I turned and hurried after the old professor.

We strode away from the village of Lampaul in silence. It was a beautiful late spring day, without a cloud in the sky. The sun dappled the surrounding foliage; it reflected on the distant sea causing it to shimmer and sparkle. Not a word did Professor Guezennec and I speak until we came to the excavation.

Guezennec took off his haversack and I saw him examining me intently.

"Now is the time, Bihanig," he said measuring his words carefully. "Do you see the sun's rays approaching the tip of the menhir, see the way it casts the shadow of the stone across the altar slab..? Soon the tip of that shadow will reach the centre of the altar. That will be the moment. Thousands of years have passed since this stone and this altar were brought together. Thousands of years since those learned ancients linked the two worlds - this world and the Other-world."

I shuddered at the intensity in his voice.

Could he really believe in what he was saying? In spite of the brightness of the day I felt cold; very cold. How could anyone, in this day and age, accept the ancient belief of two parallel worlds - the world of the living which gave up the dead and the world of the dead which gave up the living? The constant exchange of souls?

Guezennec was kneeling down and undoing his haversack. From it he extracted the famous *An Men Kanan*. I recognised the stone immediately. As he did so I became aware that the day had grown suddenly darker. I peered at the sky; it was still blue. There were no clouds passing across the face of the sun...yet it was dark and cold. I shivered.

Guezennec was smiling.

"Do you hear it, my young friend?" he asked eagerly.

I was aware of a strange humming.

"Hear it? It knows...it *knows*!"

I stared at his pale face in horror.

Clearly the man was deranged. What spell was he working on me that I felt such fear, such horror; that I began to imagine it dark and cold on a bright spring day, that I imagined the stone to hum when there was no breeze...no breeze!

Guezennec was cradling the ellipsoid object to his chest like a mother nursing a baby.

"It knows!" he positively crooned.

I tried to speak, coughed, and muttered thickly: "This is ridiculous."

I felt a numbness, as if I were unable to move. My heart was beating very fast - too fast.

The old professor raised the stone above his head, holding it at arm's reach.

The noise burst around me without warning.

A fierce exultant sound; a choir of savage joy. Yet it was difficult to say how the sound was made for it seemed to come from within my head rather than outside. It was a chorus of exhilaration; a chorus which vibrated within my body, spreading with such intensity that I thought the ground was swaying beneath me. I felt the hairs on the nape of my neck standing out. I tried to tell my mind that this could not be happening. Yet it was.

Guezennec gave a shout of triumph - of frenzied ebullition.

"I am right! I am right!"

I could barely hear his words above the cacaphony of vibrating noise.

Holding 'The Singing Stone' before him, he moved slowly towards the altar slab.

The noise increased; increased so that it was almost unbearable. It hammered at my temples so that it became almost a physical difficulty to keep my eyes open.

Guezennec was nearing the altar now.

Suddenly I found my voice, fighting against the terrible fear which oppressed me.

"No!" I screamed. "You must not! You cannot!"

My mind ran riot with dreadful visions. What if Guezennec was right - what if entire generations of ancients had been right - what if the Otherworld really existed and *An Men Kanan* was the key to open a passageway between the two worlds? And what would happen if the passageway were opened? What manner of things waited to enter our world? If the ancients had

the key, why had it been hidden, why had it been concealed? Surely there was a reason?

Standing there a terrible realisation dawned on me that the ancients knew - knew and dreaded the link between their world and the Otherworld.

For a second Guezennec paused, glancing over his shoulder at me. There was a grin of triumph on his features.

"Soon we will know, Bihanig!" he cried. "Soon the passage will be opened and our eyes will rest on the meaning of life, of creation. I dare the ancient gods - Bel the lifegiver, Lugh, Balor and Mannanan Mac Lir. I dare them for it is my right!"

His voice was harsh above the constant hum.

I have never seen a man so demented before.

He took another step which brought him before the altar stone and, using all his strength, he raised 'The Singing Stone' above it, stretching out so that he could lower the stone, end first, to insert it into the waiting grooves.

I groaned with pain as the tones of the humming increased yet again.

Slowly the stone came down, downwards towards the grooves. My eyes watched in dread as I saw it being lowered.

The key! Yet what would it unlock - what would it unleash into our world?

The landscape blinked! There is no other way to describe it. It was as if a positive photograph of my surroundings suddenly changed to a negative, and then back to a positive.

I staggered a little, experiencing a violent sickness and dizzy feeling.

The air was momentarily filled with strange aromas, odours that were a mixture of sweetness and the vile stench of corruption combined.

An exhilarated wailing filled the air.

The sky was changing from blue to black and blue again.

Fear! My God! I never knew what fear was until that moment. The awesome realisation of what Laouig Guezennec was about to do struck me with a dread I never wish to experience again. Guezennec was about to destroy the world. Nothing less.

I cannot explain what power took possession of me there and then but I found that I had the power to move; had the power to move and was racing forward over the ground towards Guezennec as he

struggled to fit 'The Singing Stone' into the altar slab. I moved more or less by instinct, racing like a drunken sailor across a tilting, swaying deck.

Somehow I seized Guezennec, seized him by the back of his collar and jerked him backwards with such violence that he went staggering away from the altar, staggering back to collide with a nearby standing stone, letting out a wailing of anger and fear, before crumpling to the ground.

'The Singing Stone' stood balancing on the altar slab, not quite inserted into the waiting grooves.

I leant forward and grabbed it, feeling its throbbing vibration beneath my hands.

A curious urge to carry on where Guezennec had left off came on me; I heard an urgent whisper from I know not where, urging me to place the stone in position, urging, cajoling, pleading! If I would learn the secret of the universe, all I had to do was...all I had to do...

I heard a voice screaming from a long way off; it was myself. I was screaming; screaming to protect myself from this insanity.

I raised the stone and, it seemed, a thousand electric impulses, tiny shocks, began to throb down my arms, twisting and tearing through my body, into my brain, my mind.

With a sobbing cry, I threw the stone at the altar.

For a split second there was a sound as if the world itself were exploding. The stone shattered into a million fragments.

Behind me there came an agonised scream.

Then the most dreadful silence fell.

I must have fainted for when I recovered consciousness, I was laying on my back with the warmth of the May sun burning my face. Madame Sollicec was bending over me, concern creasing her face.

"Are you alright, young man?" she asked, her green eyes staring at me with a kind of awe.

I groaned, sat up and held my throbbing head in my hands.

"Where is Professor Guezennec?" I

asked, after a while.

The old woman clicked her tongue.

"Over there," she said, indicating with a thrust of her chin.

I turned to see the professor laying slumped against a stone, a hand lay over his heart. His eyes were open but glazed and on his face was the most agonized expression that I have ever seen on anyone.

Madame Sollicec pursed her lips.

"A heart attack. I have seen the like before."

She shivered and drew her black shawl more tightly around her shoulders.

"This is a bad place, young man. A bad place. It is not right to seek answers to the great mysteries."

*"Dibourc'han. Diwiskan hor Bro
Skuban derv sakr an Drouizad
Bez ar Gelted hag o ivin
- Ha kistin hor yaowankiz -
Ma kane enne hol laboused-mi."*

I stared at the old woman as the verse from Angela Duval, the Breton poet, tripped from her tongue.

She stared at me a long time.

"I will get my man, Yann, to take the professor back to the hotel. We shall have to telephone for a doctor in Le Conquet."

I nodded, gazing at Guezennec.

"A heart attack?"

She nodded emphatically.

"It is not right to seek answers to the great mysteries," she said again. "Will you be able to walk back to the cottage by yourself?"

"I think so," I said as I climbed to my feet and stood for a moment leaning against that black, brooding altar.

I stared about me a little bemused.

What were the lines the old woman had quoted?

*Denuding. Unclothing our country.
Sweeping away the Druids' holy oak
The Celts' birch and their yew
- and our youths' chesnut trees -
in which our birds used to sing.*

Yes; better the trees remain; better a mantle of obscurity hang over the countryside; better that some mysteries be left as mysteries.

published in the Irish literary magazine *Feasta*. He is currently at work on *A Dictionary of Irish Mythology*, his twenty-first book, *Nícor!*, appeared from Sphere in September, while *Raven of Destiny* will be paperbacked in America by NAL. Peter's short fiction has recently turned up in such anthologies as *Shadows* and *Halloween Horrors*, and in the magazines *Weirdbook*, *Borderland* and *Eldritch Tales*. The story you have just sampled is published here for the first time in English, having previously appeared in both Breton and Cornish translations. A collection of Peter's short fiction, *My Lady of Hy-Brasil*, is due anytime now from publisher Donald M. Grant in a special collector's edition.



"He was tormenting himself."

After the Funeral

By HUGH B. CAVE

Illustration by JIM PITTS

AFTER the funeral Harry drove old Clayton Landry back to the house. It was nearly five o'clock. "I suppose I'd better plan on staying the night," Harry said. "I'm not keen about starting home at this hour."

Home was in Providence, Rhode Island, a long way from this northern Vermont village. The day had dragged and he was weary.

Old Clayton, who had looked after Father for the past two years, prepared a meal of cabbage and pork, and they ate it together in the farmhouse kitchen. As a boy Harry had eaten breakfast at the same table every day of his life from the time he left his high-chair until he was fifteen years old. On his fifteenth birthday he had run away.

"Tell me again how you found him, Clay," he said to push back the silence.

Clayton frowned at him as though bewildered by the question. He was a white-haired seventy-seven and had looked a little ridiculous in his black funeral suit. Having changed now to his usual overalls, he blended a bit better into the surroundings. "I found him in the attic, Mr. Harry."

"I know that, Clay."

"On the bed up there."

"You told me that, too."

"Then what else can I tell you, Mr. Harry?"

"He'd been going up there every night, you say?"

"Almost every night, since the letter came from the asylum."

"And you would hear him pacing back and forth up there, reading his Bible?"

"That's right. But, like I said, it wasn't at all the way he used to read the Bible in the parlour, downstairs here. Down here he used to read about sex and sin. Up there it was forgiveness."

"You could hear what he was saying?"

"My Lord, yes, Mr. Harry. Both down here and up there he yelled out the words like he wanted the whole country to hear him. But you must know that. He carried on the same way when you was here, I'm told."

"Not in the attic, Clay."

"He did down here, though. Every housekeeper he ever had talked about it."

Yes, Harry thought, Father had certainly carried on down here, even before Mother went away. He would never forget how the man marched around the parlour every evening with the Book in his out-thrust hands, bellowing the words so that the very windows rattled. There were passages in the Old Testament about the sinfulness of sex that Harry remembered to this day, though they had made his head ache something awful when Father roared them out.

He could shut his eyes right now and see the man marching - six-foot six-inches tall, straight as the flagpole that stood in the front yard at that time, his voice a deep, booming bass and his hair a mass of white topping a handsome face that always seemed about to burst into flames.

The Reverend Jason W. Callinder had been preaching at the local village church before Harry was born. At fifty-four he married for the first time, taking twenty-five-year-old Yvonne Marcotte for his bride. Harry was born a year later. Six years after that, Yvonne Marcotte Callinder was declared insane and put away in an asylum, where she had died just seven months ago.

Harry had come from Providence to attend that funeral, too. But Father hadn't gone to it.

Seated now at the old kitchen table with the last of his father's many housekeepers, Harry recalled his unhappy childhood in this house and wondered how he had endured it so long. He remembered his mother as two entirely different persons. One was a pretty, flashing-eyed woman (she was French-Canadian) who sang and laughed a lot and played bright melodies on the old upright piano in the parlour.

The other, later, was a pathetically subdued creature who performed her household duties in almost total silence.

Night after night, while Father rattled the parlour windows with his Bible readings, she sat with her head bowed over her mending, never once attempting to make conversation - not even with the little boy who sat beside her, frightened half out of his wits by his father's shouting.

Then she was sent away, and there were only Father and himself and the first of the many housekeepers.

He remembered the first housekeeper rather more clearly than some of the others, perhaps because she was the first to take his mother's place. A busy, bustling woman, Mrs. Osborne had treated the six-year-old boy with kindness, even criticising Father for being too strict with him. "Now he's just a child, Reverend, and you're not to expect all that much from him," he remembered her saying more than once.

But she did not last. "When I came here I expected my evenings to be peaceful," she told Father with her hands on her hips the day she quit. "I did not expect to be subjected to a noisy sermon on sin and sex every night. Good day to you, sir. It is my considered opinion that the wrong member of this family was sent away to the asylum!"

But the Bible reading did not stop, even when other housekeepers walked out because of it. Father was always able to find someone else to cook his meals and do the housework.

Harry recalled most of the later ones only vaguely. At age eleven he had faced a larger problem. Father decided he was old enough to be of interest to the Devil.

"Harold" - plucking the gold watch from his waistcoat pocket and scowling at it - "you should have been home from school thirty-five minutes ago! Where have you been?"

Even a truthful answer was certain to elicit a suspicious stare from under those lowered white brows. An answer not quite the truth...well, Father always seemed to know, somehow. Punishment varied, from being deprived of supper to being sent to the attic.

Ah, the attic! How many hours had he spent up there? In summer it was stifling hot there under the shingled roof; in winter it was freezing cold. Always it was dark, because the two windows were

too small to let in more than slivers of light.

There was a bed, an old iron thing with a torn and musty mattress on it, but he was forbidden to use it. Even the old rocking chair was denied him. If he wished to sit, he must use either the floor or the straightbacked chair with the broken cane seat.

There was a big wooden box of old books and magazines up there, too, but he was not allowed to touch it. Once he dared to peek anyway, and discovered the magazines were Sunday School publications for children - at least, the ones on top were, and he was not brave enough to probe more deeply. As it was, he was terrified that Father would discover what he had done and find some new way to punish him. Being sent to the attic was awful enough.

Frowning across the kitchen table now at old Clayton Landry, Harry said, "When did you say Father moved to the attic for his Bible readings?"

"Right after the letter came from the institution."

"Did he tell you what was in the letter?"

Clayton shrugged his bony shoulders.

"From the day I come here to work, sir, he never confided in me. As a matter of fact, he never even mentioned the letter. I wouldn't've known he got it except he was out of the house that day when the postman came." His shoulders twitched again. "All I know is, he asked me could I run an extension cord from his bedroom so's he could have a light in the attic. I done it, and the next thing I knew, I was hearing him up there every evening instead of in the parlour. But, like I told you, the words was different."

"No more sex and sin."

"Nope."

"Now he wanted forgiveness."

"I didn't say that. What I said was he read a lot of Bible words having to do with forgiveness. I can't imagine him ever thinking he needed forgiving for anything."

He did, though, Harry thought bitterly. *Oh, but he did!*

Vividly to mind came the terrible Sunday evening when Father, home from church ahead of him, had thundered at him to come into the parlour the moment the front door clicked shut behind him. Sitting there like a god of judgment in his chair, the white-haired man roared, "Where have you been? I have been home for nearly an hour!"

"I walked Amy Leslie home, Father."

"For what? To have sex with her?"

"Father, please. We are just friends."

"We're in the same home room in school."

Father stabbed a finger at him, and it was like being menaced by a bolt of lightning with the man's face an awesome thundercloud behind it. "I saw you talking to her. I saw you *touching* her!"

"People touch each other all the time, Father. It only means they are friends and like each other. It doesn't --"

"Be quiet! I have seen this coming on in you. You are your mother's son! Go to the attic and remain there until I come for you!"

He went to the attic. Even there, with the trap door at the top of the ladder closed, he heard his father thundering in the parlour about the sinfulness of sex, and about temptation - all passages he had heard many times before but delivered now with a fervor that terrified him. That evening in the attic he felt hatred for his father for the first time. But when the white-haired man climbed the ladder and pushed up the trap door and came to him with a leather belt dangling from one huge hand, the hatred turned again to terror.

"Take down your trousers!"

All the next day his bottom bled, staining his clothes. The housekeeper then was a Miss Emily Adlam, younger than most, and she washed him and put salve on him. More important, she sympathised when he announced he was going to run away.

"I'll help you," she said.

They planned it together. Both would leave the following Sunday while Father was in church, preaching against sin and sex and the Devil. He would pretend to be too ill to go to church; she would insist on staying at home in case he needed her.

"My brother will drive you to Waterbury in his car," she said, "and you can take a bus there for Boston, where I have a married sister. I'll give you a letter, and they will help you."

The last time he saw his father alive was that Sunday morning, when from the window of his room he looked down and watched the Reverend Jason W. Callinder, then seventy, stride bareheaded down the road with a Bible in one hand and the sun all aglitter in his mane of white hair.

A week later, in Boston, he obtained a job as a messenger boy with Western Union and moved into an inexpensive room-

ing house to begin a life on his own.

"I WONDER," said Harry to the man at the kitchen table with him, "what made him change from sin and sex to forgiveness. Was it the letter, Clay?"

"I wouldn't know, sir. But that's when he changed - right after it came."

"He shouted about the sinfulness of sex all the time I can remember. You were a neighbour of ours then. Did he do it when I was very young?"

"Even before you were born, Mr. Harry."

"And he changed to forgiveness after the letter came. M'm... Very interesting, don't you think?"

"To say the least, sir."

"Do you suppose that letter might still be around here somewhere, Clay? In his room, perhaps?"

"We could look."

"Finish your food first. We have all evening to solve the mystery of my dear father. I doubt we'll be able to, anyway."

They finished eating. Clayton carried the dishes to the sink and filled the sink with water to make the washing-up easier when he returned to it. Climbing the wide, uncarpeted stairs to the floor above, they went together along the hall to the big front bedroom that had been used by Harry's father - and also, at one time, by his French Canadian mother.

A search of the old maple chest of drawers there turned up nothing of interest. Peering back into the hall, Harry said, "Do you suppose the attic...?"

"It's possible. He spent every evening up there toward the end."

"We'll need flashlights."

"Uh-uh. You're forgetting I installed a light up there, Mr. Harry. It works from here." Kneeling, Clayton took up a wire with a plug on the end of it, and inserted the plug into a baseboard outlet. "She's on now 'less the bulb burned out. You still remember how to get up there, sir?"

"I will till I die."

"Well, that shouldn't be soon, you being a young man yet."

"Let's hope not."

"He died up there, though," Clayton said. "And they don't know yet what of." With a sidelong glance at Harry he added, "Do they, sir?"

"If they do, I haven't been told, Clay."

"But you want to go up there, even so?"

"I think I want to read that letter."

Night was falling now. It came early

at this time of year, and they had spent a long time in the kitchen, eating and talking. Clayton switched on the hall light as they went along to the attic ladder.

The ladder was just as Harry remembered it: A pair of nearly vertical two-by-fours rising to the trap door in the hall ceiling, with shorter lengths of the same wood nailed on for rungs. As a boy he had always found the rungs too far apart and supposed Father had made them that way on purpose, to add to his punishment. Now as he climbed up after old Clayton they seemed less taxing.

Clayton pushed open the trap door and, indeed, the opening was yellow with light as he had predicted. Not a bright light, but better than nothing. Boosting himself onto the attic's rough board flooring, Harry straightened and looked about, remembering.

How many times before running away had he been sent up here as punishment for the sins of his childhood, such as daring to be alone with a girl? How often, even before the last terrible flogging, had he been whipped up here? Bitterness burned in him like swallowed acid as he thought about it.

And the room had not changed, even in the smallest detail. Over there was the forbidden bed, over there the rocker he had never been permitted to use. And almost directly under the dangling light bulb was the box of magazines he had once almost dared to delve into.

He knelt beside the box now, saying to Clayton, "If the letter's up here at all, this is probably where we'll find it. He told me time and time again if I ever disturbed this box he would hand me over to the Devil."

"Did you believe him, sir? I mean, when you was that young did you believe in the Devil?"

"I did, Clay. Indeed I did."

"And do you now, sir, if I might ask? You're not a preacher like he was, are you?"

"No, I'm not a preacher."

"What do you do down there in Providence, sir, if I might ask?"

Harry did not answer. While talking, he had been tossing magazines out of the box - the same Sunday School papers he had found when he dared to look before. Now in his hands he held something different. Oh, but *different*. What he held in his hands now, with the overhead

light shining directly down on it, was a handsome, smooth-paper magazine with a nude woman on its cover.

"So," Harry said in a barely audible whisper, "So!"

He opened the magazine. It consisted almost solely of photographs in colour of nude women and nude men engaged in sex in a variety of ways. On one such picture was written in what he recognised as Father's handwriting, 'This is sinful. Never would I do this!' On another was written, 'Oh, God, why must I be so everlastingly tempted? Why can I not have peace?'

Harry handed the magazine to the man watching him and dug deeper into the box. There were many such magazines. There were thirty, at least. All of them bore comments in Father's unmistakable script:

'No man should permit this to be done to him. It can only lead straight to Damnation.'

'This woman should be condemned to Hell.'

'How loathsome! Yet I know that if it were offered to me, God forgive me, I could not refuse it.'

Harry looked at his companion. "Did you expect anything like this, Clay?"

"Lord, no, Mr. Harry! Never!"

"Notice the dates. Not all of these are recent. Some must have been here when I was here. Even before I was born."

"And all the time he thundered about the sinfulness of sex, he was tormenting himself with these." Clayton shook his head in wonder. "The poor man. With two such powerful urges pulling at him, he must have felt he was being torn apart all the time." He leaned forward to see what Harry had just lifted from the box. "Mr. Harry, that's the letter! That's it in your hand. The letter from the asylum!"

Harry rose from his knees and walked to the rocking chair he had so often wanted to sit in. He sat. He took the letter out of its envelope and saw that it was typewritten. Before starting to read it, he looked to see who had written it.

The signature was a scrawl, but under it was typed, 'Adrian McFarlane, M.D., Chief of Staff.'

'Dear Mr. Callinder,' the letter began. 'Just before her death here your wife asked me to take a message for you, and I did so because she was at that time unusually lucid even though physically very

weak. She asked to make a statement that could be delivered to you after her death. I might add that I tape-recorded our conversation. If you wish, I will send you a copy of the tape so that you may check the accuracy of what I am about to tell you.

'Your wife said that you savagely turned against her when you learned that she was pregnant, because you knew the child could not be yours. You believed sex was sinful and never had intercourse with her - in fact, never even allowed yourself to touch her. You assumed that her pregnancy was the result of her having been unfaithful to you with some other man.

'This, your wife told me, is not true. She was never touched by another man. What happened is that on a night when you were away from home, preaching in another part of the state, she had a dream. It was an unusually vivid dream. I will not go into details here, but nearly ten minutes of the tape are taken up by her account of this strange dream. In it, she says, she was assaulted by what she calls a minion of the Devil whose objective was to humiliate you. This demon overpowered her and raped her, she told me. When she awoke he was gone. But, she insists, it could not have been merely a dream, for she was made pregnant in fact.

'You may ask why she did not tell you this at the time. I asked her this and her answer was that you were so violently opposed to anything pertaining to sex that she kept silent out of pure terror.

'It is for you to evaluate all this, Mr. Callinder. I myself am an atheist, believing in neither God nor Devil. I can only say that at the time of our conversation your wife was not insane. Perhaps if she had found the courage to tell you this when it happened, she would never have become a patient of ours.'

HARRY had read the letter to himself, in silence. Now before handing it to his companion he said, "Tell me something, Clay. You found my father on the bed, here, I believe you said."

"Yes, sir."

"Are you telling me everything?"

"Well, sir...he was naked."

"I see. Go on."

"On his back, sir. With his hands on his - you know."

"And?"

"He was a mess, sir, all wet and - well - messy. The bed, too. And you know

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something? I think that's what killed him. The shame of doing it, I mean. To him it must have been like surrendering to the Devil after all the years of fighting him."

"I wouldn't be surprised," Harry said. "Here." De held out the letter. "Read this."

Clayton was a slow reader. It took him a long time to reach the end of the letter. Even then he did not grasp its major implication right away.

"My goodness, Mr. Harry," he said. "If this is true, what she says, she was drove crazy for a thing she never did."

"Of course."

"No wonder your father switched over from sin and sex to forgiveness. He needed all the forgiving he could get!"

"He must have believed her, too, you know," Harry said gently.

"Huh?"

"That she was raped by a demon."

"Well," Clayton said, still clutching the letter and scowling at it, "don't you believe her? Your own mother?"

"Of course I do."

That was when Clayton got it. He looked up from the letter. He looked at Harry. His eyes grew large, and a little twitch

drew the corners of his mouth down. "But," he said, "but...if it was a demon got your mother pregnant...then you...you must be..." Swaying on his feet, he dropped the letter and sucked in a breath. "What do you do there in Providence, Mr. Harry? You never did answer me when I asked you!"

Harry sardonically grinned at him. "Well, of course, Clay, one thing I *had* to do there was grow up, and I guess I've done that. At least, I'm pretty sure I wouldn't let Father have his way with me now." Still grinning, he glanced up at the dangling light bulb.

The light went out. When it came on again of its own accord a few seconds later, old Clayton Landry saw that he was alone in the attic.

On groping his way downstairs he found he was alone there, too. Harry's car was still in the yard, but Clayton had an idea cars were not very necessary to a person like Harry. It had been a rented car anyway, he remembered.

One thing he knew for certain: He sure to God wasn't going to stay in that house overnight, even with Harry gone.

Shaking all over and moaning with terror, he fled into the night.

The last time Hugh B. Cave's fiction appeared in *Fantasy Tales* was back in number 8, and we are extremely pleased to once again publish one of the best and most prolific of the original pulp writers. Remarkably, Hugh had over 800 yarns published in the pulp magazines, including (of course) *Weird Tales*. More recently, he is expecting stories to surface any moment in *Whispers*, *Borderland* and *New Black Mask*. For booklength work, a new novel called *Disciples of Dread* is currently being marketed, whilst the author is assembling a collection of theme stories, tentatively titled *Cryptocats: Fantasy Cat Tales*. A book about Hugh B. Cave is also in preparation, based on the steady correspondence he had with Carl Jacobi in the 1930s, and is being compiled by Audrey Parente, president of the Small Press Writers and Artists Organization. Purple Prose Press will probably publish a collection of pulp adventure and detective stories in facsimile edition, reprinting the original illustrations. Readers may remember Carcosa's superb award-winning collection *Murgenstrum & Others* from 1977 and will be pleased to know that Karl Edward Wagner's publishing venture still intends to issue a follow-up volume of dark fantasy stories, called *Death Stalks the Night*. *After the Funeral* is published here for the first time anywhere.





"Beyond the physical, we had a great emotional rapport."

Twins

By DAVID CASE

Illustration by ANDREW SMITH

"DOCTOR," she said, "...have you ever read *The Portrait of Dorian Grey*?" It seemed a curious way to begin a consultation but one learns that a patient's approach is often oblique. I nodded. She nodded, in turn. She was a pretty girl, dark and vibrant, but she looked unhealthy; there were dark circles under her eyes and her complexion was not clear. She was too thin. She leaned towards me across the desk, wistful and worried.

"I am a twin," she said. "An identical twin. My name is Julia; my sister is Jennifer. I asked her to come here with me today, but she did not choose to. The older by several minutes, I have always felt a certain responsibility towards her, and yet she is independent. In that way, we differ. Physically, we are exact. It is more than resemblance, it is...duplication. Only our parents can tell us apart and even they sometimes make mistakes; father more often than mother. I...this is most difficult for me, doctor. You are in no hurry? I should like to take my time. Thank you, you are very kind."

Smiling, she took a cigarette from her case. She raised her eyebrows at me, looking at the cigarette and I shrugged. I did not care if she smoked. But then she did not light it, but trifled with it, bringing it to her lips and turning it in her fingers, like one trying to break the habit.

She continued her exordium.

"In school, we were subject to the usual rumours and gossip concerning twins...apocryphal, I assure you...that one is chaste, the other lewd; that we switched dates for amusement; that we exchanged places at examinations, thereby specializing and combining our learning. Well, all that is nothing. The physical...well, beyond the physical, we had a great emotional rapport. We shared feelings. Often, while apart, we could still feel what the other was feeling and would often be happy or sad without apparent cause via this

sympathetic link. You have heard of cases like this, no doubt. I don't know the medical or psychological terms...some form of glandular chemistry? Well, no matter. It was not an unpleasant thing. But then ..."

She paused and lit the cigarette at last. She sucked furiously upon it, but awkwardly. The smoke, drifting across her face, added a dreamlike vagueness to her bearing. She seemed to be attacking the cigarette with violence; then she stabbed it out fiercely and, smiling, said, "I don't really smoke, doctor." I thought she expected praise and told her it would not be a good idea to start; at that, she grimaced.

She said, "That was the first manifestation."

She thought for awhile.

"No, not the first. Of course not. But it was the first that I minded. It seemed so unfair...the craving for nicotine. The earlier signs...I was willing to endure them, perhaps I even welcomed them; as I told you, I was the older; I felt an obligation to shield and protect Jennifer as best I could. But it had become a one-way current that flowed between us and superseded the emotional...I must be more specific, I know; I tend to ramble at times. Let me think...yes, the first true sign came when my sister took up ballet. She was an enthusiastic girl, she always went at things vigorously, overdoing them. She overdid this and I...became stiff and sore, although I had been inactive, myself. My sister experienced no discomfort, it was all transferred to me...to my body. Well, that was when she first came to realise that she need not be moderate. And when I first saw that she was selfish. Although I told her of the discomfort her dancing caused me, she would not moderate her routine; would not be patient and let my body have time to become accustomed to such abuse. I tolerated it as best I could trying not to complain; ballet, after all,

was not a bad thing and it was no doubt doing us both some good. But my sister, physically unaccountable for her actions, became reckless. Driving her motorcar too fast, she was involved in an accident. Her leg was badly injured and she was taken to hospital. In the morning, to the amazement of the doctors and nurses, her leg was perfectly healed...and I awoke with a painfully bruised and discoloured thigh."

She stared at me as if she expected skepticism.

I said, "These are strange things, yet not unknown; they have been documented and studied."

She nodded. She had another cigarette in her hand, turning it like a miniature baton, unlighted.

"And then, doctor...then, in her selfishness...my sister fell into bad habits. She became...degenerate. Caring nothing for me, she chose to take advantage of the curious transfer between us; seeing that she could abuse and deprave herself as she pleased, without ill effects...she sank into debauchery."

She lighted the cigarette then, drawing voraciously upon it, then jerking it from her lips as if she found it repellent.

"It was doubly hard on me, doctor, for I have always been a woman of moderation; I was unaccustomed to the symptoms of excess. My sister smoked and drank and...and went with men; often she did not get home before dawn. Yet she remained youth-

ful and healthy and alert, while I... Often I awoke with a hangover, having drunk nothing; my mouth tasted constantly of tobacco, although I did not smoke; it became necessary to use cigarettes, against my will, for my system begged me for nicotine; I was constantly fatigued, no matter how long I slept, for while I slept in innocence, Jennifer transferred abuse to me. I pleaded with her; she laughed at me...She could see what she was doing to me; she did not care. You, too, can see, doctor...see how haggard I am? How dull my eyes, my hair? How fragile my body? Yet there is no tonic you may prescribe for me, no programme that will lead me back to health, for my sister continues... doctor, she has sunk to the very depths of depravity. And that is why I have come to you, doctor; you must help me... and my sister, too."

I waited, not sure what she wanted.

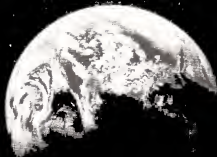
"Doctor," she said, "I must have an abortion."

She was not smoking now, and yet her countenance blurred as if smoke were drifting across her face and tears had gathered in her eyes. She reached out and plucked at my sleeve. "I do not believe in abortion, doctor...and yet in this case...if I have the child, it will ruin both our lives...surely you can see that, doctor...you can see the necessity." She forced a sad smile. Then, as an afterthought, she said, "I am, of course, a virgin..."

David Case has not, unfortunately, found much time to devote to horror fiction, most of his writing being modern pulp westerns and soft-porn novels under a variety of pseudonyms. That's a pity because his two collections, *The Cell* (1969) and *Fengriffen* (1971) were highly regarded. (The title story of the latter was filmed by Amicus as *—And Now the Screaming Starts!*). Case published two horror novels, *Wolftracks* (Tower, 1980) and *The Third Grave* (Arkham House, 1981). Arkham also has another novel, *Pelican Quay*, although no publication date has yet been set. It may in fact become a collection with additional stories, such as *Among the Wolves*. Twins appears here for the first time, and as for other short stories, Ramsey Campbell has one, *The War is Over*, for a forthcoming Tor Books anthology and David tells us he's beginning a new fantasy, *The Terrestrial Fanny* - the precursor we hope for a larger output in the genre.



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"They vanished like so many wind-blown leaves."

Zerail

By JOSEPHA SHERMAN

Illustration by JIM PITTS

HARL was tall, blond, sleek and, at the moment, running for his life. But there'd been no sign of pursuit, not for some time. The young man turned in the saddle, looking back the way he'd come. Ha! He'd crossed the border some time ago, and even though he didn't doubt the soldiers were still somewhere not too far behind him, surely they wouldn't dare follow him onto foreign soil.

"The hell they won't! After all, I killed their Prince's nephew, damn his foolish heroics!"

It had all been working so well, too. Harl, with his blond handsomeness - oh, he'd lived off his looks many a time, women were all too ready to believe anything he'd tell them. And this time he'd even slyly worked his way right into the royal court, actually managed to seduce away the Prince's niece! She'd thought it so romantic, the silly little bitch, she'd really believed him a wanderer of royal blood, like something out of a minstrel's tale. She'd really believed he meant to marry her.

"It never dawned on her that I was just waiting to hear from her uncle. Oh, the Prince would have willingly paid and paid to be rid of me. And I would have taken him - gods, how I would have taken him! - swearing and swearing all the while that of course I'd leave his lands, of course there wouldn't be a breath of scandal." Harl bit his lip in anger. "There would have been a certain amount of risk, yes, but I'd have been protected from royal assassins by the statements I'd left in every temple strongbox. It would have worked - Eh, but then that young fool of a brother spoiled it all. Damn him! Who'd have thought the boy would have been cunning enough to track us? And who'd have thought he'd have been stupid enough to come after his sister all by himself?"

His mind shot back to that desperate,

ridiculous struggle in the little attic room, and all the while the girl screaming her head off. Well, he'd killed her brother, had to; stabbed him with his own knife before the boy had even drawn his sword.

"Should have finished off the girl, too, witness that she was. Would have, too, dammit, but there wasn't time. Too many people saw me, and the knife, and the body - Eh, nothing I can do about that now."

He was already tired of running, and tired of that persistent weight of cold fear in his stomach. But he wasn't safe, no; the Prince was known for his stubbornness. Disguise himself as he would, Harl would still have to keep right on running until one day someone slid a subtle knife into him in a crowded marketplace or someone slipped something into his food or drink.

Or, should the Prince grow desperate enough, until someone sent a demon after him - gods!

A shuddering Harl fled from the intolerable into the momentary refuge of his favourite dream. It was based on what he'd once seen on a street in the gods-only-knew-what-city. A glimpse of an enchanter - one of the great ones, too - walking alone and quite unarmed, and the crowds parting respectfully about him, and he all the while radiating supreme, unshakable self-confidence. No mere demon would bother him! And, as always, Harl recast the role, seeing the enchanter with *his* face, feeling the sorcerous power heady as wine. *That* was how things should be!

A stamp of his horse's hoof brought Harl back to reality with a shock. He looked about wildly, cursing himself for an idiot. If they'd found him while he'd been mentally wandering... No, everything was quiet.

"Fool's luck. Enough maunderings, dammit."

But for once he couldn't quite shake the dream. And Harl frowned, wondering. What if he... Eh, that was stupid. And yet... What if he really did learn sorcery? He'd never truly thought about it before, not seriously. After all, he'd never needed to think about it, he'd never been in this kind of fix, never killed anybody of royal blood before.

And suddenly Harl laughed aloud. "Why not? Why in the names of all the gods not? I'm quick of wit, quick to learn. And if I could find myself a sorcerer willing to teach me... Hell, aren't they all supposed to be hunting for apprentices? It would solve everything. I'd be safe. Safe, hell! I'd have a chance for power, for wealth, for - gods, for anything I might ever want! Why not, indeed!"

THE enchanter was called Zerail, and Zerail was said to be older by far than the nearby town, and more powerful than any mere Prince, and that was all any townsman was willing to say.

It was enough for Harl. He never once considered that Zerail might refuse him. What, he, the man who'd seduced a royal niece? And indeed, he'd soon charmed his smooth way right up to the enchanter's elegant stone manor house.

But Zerail's servants... He felt a prickle of superstitious fear at the sight of their vague, shadowy shapes - Dammit, no! He'd get used to such things. He must.

"I would speak with your master," he told them firmly, and watched them flutter in boneless confusion.

"We have no master."

"Zerail. I would speak with Zerail."

They vanished like so many wind-blown leaves and left him standing uneasily by the great silver-bound gates for a long while, he trying not to keep looking over his shoulder, trying to ignore overwrought nerves that were screaming that this was a trap, that the Prince's men were surely in ambush all around. Eh, ridiculous! Once within the enchanter's house he'd be safe, enchanters protected their guests. Didn't they?

A flicker of motion - Harl shied like a startled horse, then swore at himself under his breath. The gates were sliding open just one man-width, and a soft voice was bidding him enter. Straight-backed with determined bravado, he followed his elusive guides down silent halls rich with gleam of marble, glint of gold. Eh,

this was better! Mysterious Zerail had good taste. And wealth. Oh yes, wealth!

But here was a large, book-lined room, a study, and -- Here was Zerail.

Harl stood frozen. Hell, why hadn't the townspeople warned him? He'd expected age. Gods, more than that, he'd expected a man! He stared as helplessly as any green boy as the enchanter - no, dammit, the enchantress! - moved smoothly from her desk to look up at him. Ai, beautiful, beautiful... He couldn't take his eyes from the sleek curves of her, subtle beneath the modest blue gown and waves of dark hair. The blood pounded in his ears at the sight, deafening him. Had she been any other, he knew wildly, he would - he must - have taken her there and then, and to hell with the consequences. But...

Her eyes were most surely not young.

Her eyes were inhumanly yellow.

Her eyes were cool and alive with power.

And Harl remembered sanity and stood where he was. He bowed his most courtly bow. "My lady. Thank you for seeing me."

He smiled. Oh, that smile had melted many a stubborn resistance before this! And he thought with a sudden spark of delight that it hadn't gone wasted here.

"How should I not see so fair a young guest?" Her voice was as smooth and cool as water. "My servants tell me you've come to learn. Why?"

He had the story all ready. Sad, sad, the wasted years, the sudden anguished realization of the futility of his life. The desire to make something of himself, the aching longing for inner peace, inner knowledge - oh, it was enough to melt stone.

And Zerail? The enchantress' face was closed, her eyes yellow topaz. Gods, thought Harl in quick panic, if she can read minds, I'm dead!

But all she said was a flat, "I have never taken an apprentice. Why should I take one now?"

Enchantress or no, Harl told himself, she's still a woman, only a woman. And he smiled the subtlest of smiles, let his eyelids fall just the tiniest bit, put just the barest hint of fire into his voice. "Why lady! None of your servants are flesh-and-blood. Surely there are many...services I can render you?"

Did he see a flicker of answering fire in those yellow eyes? "Perhaps you can," murmured Zerail. "Perhaps you can."

Your name?"

"Harl." Bemused, he let that slip out before he could stop and think. But hell, what difference did it make? She didn't know who he was. Why should he lie?

"Eh, so quick with it? Are you such an innocent?"

"My - lady?"

"Has no one ever told you the power of names? Did you really think Zerail my true name? Oh, innocent indeed!"

Her smile, her tone of voice, her very stance were all at once so blatantly, so infuriatingly mocking that Harl tensed in sudden hot fury. Why, the bitch! The superior bitch! He'd never let a woman laugh at him before, and he wasn't about to - Eh, wait. This was a test, this was surely a test.

"Lady," he said levelly, though it nearly choked him, "I admit I am ignorant. I would learn. Will you teach me?"

"And can you learn? You are a bit old for a starting apprentice." Her voice was changing as she spoke, becoming slowly very serious. Zerail hesitated, studying him a moment. "And do you know what lies before you?" she murmured. "Ah, my young Harl, it must all seem so simple to you! But I am so many slow years your senior! For longer and longer than thrice your brief life I've learned and toiled and suffered..." Her eyes were black with memory. "Magic is no easy thing. Can you endure it?"

Was she trying to frighten him away? Harl sneered inwardly, but he straightened, the essence of a heroic nobleman. "I can."

Her eyes flashed back to the present. "So. Listen now. I will say this only once, and you must repeat my words without flaw. There are Three Rules, and the Three Rules are these:

"One: Never believe all you see.

"Two: Never believe all you hear.

"Three: Never tell all you know."

They were so much nonsense to him, and he couldn't see their bearing on anything, but Harl was a quick study; he repeated them, even to catching the enchantress' exact tone of voice.

"Well, lady? Fair enough? Will you teach me?"

For a moment Zerail studied him in silence, smiling faintly. At last she murmured, "Why, it will be a pleasure."

"DAMN her. Damn her. *Damn her!*" Harl muttered his tired litany under

his breath.

How long had he been here? Nigh half a year now. Oh, he'd been safe enough, if the Prince's men had come looking for him, they'd not found him.

"But I didn't come here just for shelter! Hell, I could always have claimed sanctuary in some temple if it had come to that!"

And yet what had he learned in all this time? Only what sorcerous crumbs Zerail had deigned to teach him, that high-and-mighty bitch! Harl clenched his fists at the thought. Here he'd thought he understood her, he'd thought for sure he'd charmed her! But every time the enchantress looked his way, casual mockery was never far from her eyes, unvoiced contempt was never quite hidden behind her smooth mask of a face. Gods, how he ached to once, just once, use his fists as though she were no more than any other woman who'd dared to scorn him - No. He'd seen her destroy an inconvenient boulder with a look, a word and a flash of will. He dared not strike back.

"Yes, but how long can I wait? How long can I keep up this stupid act of being the respectful young fool?"

She'd smile and smile, and all the time those yellow eyes would be coolly amused while she'd order him to sweep the floors or carry her burdens, knowing full well he didn't dare complain - Damn her! She had servants! Let them do her work, the cold-blooded, passionless bitch!

Passionless! And for all and all that, he still wanted her. Wanted her! Gods, with every sleek move she made, he burned for her as he'd never thought to have burned for any woman! She *must* have known the effect she had on him, and yet she seemed quite blind to all his subtle and not so subtle hintings. She slept alone. While he... But no sane man, no matter how close to frenzy, tries to rape an enchantress.

"Unless that man's an enchanter." It was a new and very pleasant thought. "Oh, yes. Play your games, Zerail. Somehow I'll still manage to make you teach me true magic. I'll be your equal. And then ...Oh Zerail, and then!" He smiled thinly as he pictured that long, long revenge he'd take for all her mockeries. "Eh, but wait a moment. After that I certainly won't dare to let her live. Not an enchantress. I'll have to kill her!" Harl's smile became a cold grin. Then - to hell

with her!"

"Harl."

He straightened, smothering a gasp. There she was, standing by her desk as though she'd always been there. Gods, and had he been talking aloud? Had she overheard him?

But her face was mild. And after that first shock Harl managed to force a smile.

"My lady! How you startled me. I didn't hear you. For a moment I thought you'd materialized by magic!"

"Why Harl, you flatter me. I can no more do that than I can cast a true illusion of myself! Come here, lad. I would speak with you."

But something on her desk caught his eye, a parchment protruding from other parchments, and on it a seal that to his horrified eyes seemed to blaze with fire. Gods, the Prince's seal! Harl heard little of what Zeraïl was saying, because he saw his name, his name written clearly for all to see, and linked with the word 'murder'. Damn him for a fool, she had been right: He had been an innocent to tell her his true name! And now she knew. But perhaps she had not yet read the parchment... Harl knew enough about her by now to realise that Zeraïl was a moral woman in her own sorcerous way, a woman with a loathing of murder. Had she read the parchment, she wouldn't have hesitated to act. And with her powers... Harl remembered the casually shattered boulder, and he shuddered. But how to stop her...?

"Harl. Harl! Do you remember the Three Rules?"

What in hell? He rattled them off, "Never believe all you see, never believe all you hear, never tell all you know."

"Poor lad, how distracted you look! It's not been easy for you, has it? An apprentice must first learn both obedience and patience, and that's not been at all easy for you. You're no overawed little boy." Her gaze lingered on him. "Mmm, no little boy at all!"

There was such a sudden sultry purr to the enchantress' voice that Harl stared at her in astonishment. Her eyes were hot yellow fire, her smile languorous.

"Why Harl! You're not afraid of me, are you? Oh no, hardly that. I've seen the way you look at me. I'm not stone, lad. But you needed to learn patience.

Ahh, poor Harl, didn't you know that patience is, in time, rewarded?"

Damn her! To play the seductress now, when all he could think of was that somehow he must stop her from reading that damning parchment!

But a part of Harl's mind had gone quite clear and cold. Passionless. Zeraïl, in all her sorcerous years, must have enjoyed the gods knew how many lovers; any lovemaking on his part, no matter how skillful, wasn't going to melt her into an adoring little slave. And even should he manage to lull her completely and destroy this one parchment, she was plainly in communication with the Prince and it was only fool's luck that she didn't already know all about her apprentice.

There it was. There was only one thing to do, one way to stop her. Even if a vain little voice was boasting that not even an enchantress could resist him, and urging him to take her before he-- No, no. He dared not wait! He must act now, while she was still soft and defenseless.

"Too bad, Zeraïl," Harl murmured, and caught her in his arms. "I really would have enjoyed being an enchanter."

He bent his head to kiss her, slowly and lingeringly, but one hand was quietly slipping his knife from its sheath. Harl paused an instant, luxuriating in his moment of complete control. Forget sorcery! *Here* was true power. Oh yes, the supreme power of life or death! He summoned up all the hatred of her he'd been nurturing this past half year. Then, savouring his revenge to the fullest, Harl said, "Goodbye, bitch," and stabbed.

But something was wrong, something was terribly wrong! There was no Zeraïl in his arms, no Zeraïl at all. And he was staring down in stupid shock at himself, down at the hilt of the knife. Gods, he'd stabbed himself!

Desperate, Harl caught at the edge of the desk, but his legs wouldn't hold him and he went crashing down, even as he saw Zeraïl watching him coolly from across the room.

"How...?" he gasped. "I saw...I held..."

"You held nothing. Fool, did you really think I'd lie with you? I even gave you full warning! The First Rule, Harl; you said it yourself: Never believe all you see."

"But...but..." He broke off with a

choked gasp as pain began to seize him. But he had to know: "You told me...you couldn't materialise!"

"I can't. But I *can*, indeed, cast a very true illusion of myself."

"Damn you! You lied!"

"Of course I did! Oh Harl, the Second Rule: Never believe all you hear."

"Bitch!" It was a cry of wild rage.

Harl lunged at her, only to fall full-length, gasping, staring at Zerail, who'd not even flinched. "Help me..."

"It's too late for that."

A new spasm of pain curled him convulsively up around the knife, his hands fumbling for the hilt to pull it free, not caring if he bled to death. Ahh, the Prince's young nephew, the murdered boy dying at his feet... No! That was past: "Why are you doing this? Why?"

Zerail's eyes were yellow stone. "For justice. Harl, I knew who you were and what you were from the start."

"No..."

"Yes."

"Why...why accept me, then?"

Her sigh was old, old. "Boredom. Weariness. Your youth and handsomeness amused me. *You* amused me. For a time I even let myself hope you might somehow redeem yourself. Bah! I should have outgrown such sentiment long ago!" There was nothing of sentiment in her face. "I meant for you to see that parchment, Harl. I meant it as your final test. And had you admitted your guilt, truly done penance ... Well, who knows? But you acted just as I knew you'd act. Poor, weak, nasty man. I knew you'd try to kill me."

"You knew...everything. Yet you...you...never...said..."

"Of course not! You thought yourself so clever, so cunning. Yet you couldn't even remember the Third Rule: Never tell all you know. Goodbye, Harl."

He tried to shout at her, tried to plead with her, tried just to breathe...

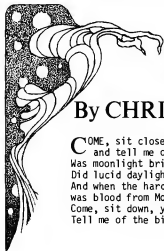
Zerail's sad smile was the last thing Harl saw before the darkness took him.

Joseph Sherman's novels for juvenile readers include *Vassilisa the Wise* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, due 1987), *The Crystal of Doom* and *The Invisibility Factor* (both Ballantine, 1986) with *The Song of Gold* due from TSR next year. Some forty short stories have appeared in *Dragon*, *Sword and Sorceress IV* (DAW Books, 1987), *Fantasy Book*, *Highlights for Children* and *Child Life*. Story books have been sold to Marvel, and there's a TV script for a childrens' SF series which may or may not see the light of day. Her story *Eira* (from the December 1984 issue of *Dragon*) was a Nebula Award nominee. *Zerail* marks Joseph Sherman's first appearance in *Fantasy Tales*.

Eradication's Rise

By CHRISTINA KIPLINGER

COME, sit closer to the hearth
and tell me of the regal birth.
Was moonlight bright? Were shadows tall?
Did lucid daylight refuse to call?
And when the hard-felt labour stopped --
was blood from Mother's forehead mopped?
Come, sit down, you're out of breath!
Tell me of the birth of Death...



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"Aunt Em was in full spate with a description of the other world."

Our Christmas Spirit

By GEORGE A. McINTYRE

Illustration by SUE SIMPSON

WHAT would Christmas be without all its traditional trimmings? Not half so much fun really, I suppose, even for us youngsters, and less still for the kids not yet out of primary. Big family get-together, Christmas tree hung with presents, stuffed turkey, plum pudding oozing fruit and spices, mince pies, nuts, and the supermarket's best-buy flowing in carefully-watched moderation in every glass.

I've heard my Gran say it wouldn't be half as much trouble for her if there was less tradition and more help going, but she doesn't mean it. She enjoys the big annual occasion when she can show her daughters-in-law just how it should be done, and it's too bad for any of them who try to muscle in with any improvements

in the kitchen. Every year an eye-wiping masterpiece of organisation with no messing about and few disasters. I admire Gran for her determination and her cooking.

I can see what she's getting at though. Not all the nuts and fruit are on the table on these occasions. A lot of them are sitting round it. Take my family for instance.

There's Aunt Alice for example - getting on to be a bit of a nympho I reckon, but then perhaps you can't blame her what with Uncle Ed being away so often. Still, they can be stimulating company, a real education, whenever the government's so incautious as to let him out for a spell, like this year.

Not everyone thinks so though. You

can see the air freeze between them and Aunt Doris. She types part-time in a lawyer's office and reckons herself to be on the other side of the fence from their sort. Her husband, Uncle Vernon, is a history lecturer at the local red-brick and does pretty well as she tells him. They always ask me how I'm getting on and although they hide their disappointment well enough, I could do without it.

Aunt Emily is way-out, every year a different fad. She's harmless on the whole and often good for a laugh in her earnest, vague way, but most of our family rows start around her. She's not married and when Aunt Alice is feeling mean or defensive on account of Uncle Ed she says that Emily is trying to compensate, whatever she thinks that means, and the trouble blows up from there. Last year's enthusiasm was vegetarianism, which was awkward for Gran. This year it was -- but we'll come to that later.

Even Grandad, who's a good old sod in his own way, has his odd side. He's an accumulator, not a collector, but one of those who heaps up piles of oddments from the past that just happen to take his fancy at any auction or sale or junk-barrow he comes across. The older and more off-beat a thing is the better he likes it. He claims it's all part of self-education, but it seems to be a pretty selective process for in spite of all my Gran says to him, her teaching never gets through and their house is always a bit of an obstacle course round the plaster statues, near-antique pottery, boxes of fossils and other junk that infest every corner.

That's the awkward part of it. The good part is that it makes him easy to cater for at Christmas. The day before my Mum had shown me a real dinky little item she'd got for him from Flash Pete, the second-hand swindler who'd had the clearing out of the house after old Professor Mortimer the archaeologist died recently. It was a six-inch stone figure of a man complete with a note by the Professor which guaranteed it as ancient Egyptian. Grandad would go nuts over it, we knew.

There are others I could mention - sometimes I feel I'm the only normal one among us - but I guess that had better do for now. So you see, we're a perfectly average collection of mild screw-balls rubbing our rough edges against each other, but gently now because it's Christmas when good-will is called for.

Perhaps if we'd all been a little less abrasive things would have worked out more profitably later on. On the other hand, if we were more ordinary the whole affair might never have happened at all.

The meal was so successful that everything went even better than usual - all claws sheathed - until near the end, when Aunt Emily gave us the first indication of what this year's fad was about. As the early night began to gather and the room darkened a little she began seeing what she called 'auras' round people's heads. Evidently she was being spiritual or mystic now.

"Bert's got a beautiful big aura," she said, looking beadily at my Dad and sort of through him at the same time, "just the colour of the wine he's drinking now."

"Here, come off it, Em," Dad protested, putting down his glass darn quick as if he'd just noticed it in his hand. He's a beer man normally and tends to think in pints, which was why wine glasses seemed a bit unreal to him and also why my Mum was glaring at him now. She's pretty tolerant, but not in public.

Aunt Emily wasn't knocked off her stride. "Eddie, now," she went on. "His is so unusual, sort of covered with dark blue stripes --"

"Bars more likely," put in Doris with a nasty laugh.

Of course that started Alice off on her, but Uncle Ed hit the wrong target when he'd worked out what it meant. A good man with his hands, Uncle Ed, but a mite slow, which is why he's so often inside. It was rather good for him, though a pity just at this moment, that he thought he could come through with a smart answer.

"Bars, eh?" he said in that ponderous way of his. "No worse than the bars Bert's always hanging around. No hang-overs anyhow, har, har!"

Naturally that brought my Mum and Dad back together and they pitched in against him. A real Barney got under way and lasted even after Gran switched on the lights which apparently killed the auras stone dead.

You couldn't stop Aunt Emily though when she was in the middle of one of her crazes. After the meal was over, with peace restored, she started up again.

"There's this little group of us, just a dozen or so, and we meet every week," she enthused. "I really do think I'm developing some real powers. You must let

me try for you."

Well, everyone was feeling well fed and indulgent, and not wanting to start another row so soon after the last, so in the end we humoured her by putting the lights out again. Grandad grumbled about heathen nonsense when he saw what she was getting up to, and he and my Dad, who was still a little sore about having attention drawn from the colour of his aura, sat by the fire smoking while the rest of the grown-ups stayed at the table holding hands, and Aunt Em began putting on a show of going into a trance.

I sat in the corner behind my Dad with the kids, waiting for a bit of amateur ventriloquism.

"Everybody concentrate their minds on things of the spirit," began Aunt Em, "while I see if I can pick up any response."

I saw Uncle Ed grin towards my Dad at the mention of spirits and heard, although fortunately no one else did, I think, Dad's growl of, "Only way she'll pick up anything at her age, silly old cow!" He must have been really riled, and I began to feel sorry for him. He's not such a bad old guy on the whole.

Meanwhile Aunt Em was in full spate with a description of the other world allegedly relayed to her by what she called a guide. Most of the circle seemed pretty impressed and were obviously concentrating as ordered. To me it sounded just the sort of place someone like her would dream up if they were half-zoned on spirituality - a hive of pure living and high thinking, a world moulded apparently out of pink tooth-paste, antiseptic, soggy and rather nauseating.

After a good deal of this waffle she began carping about how difficult it all was. "I can't get any deeper unaided," she grouched in a far-away sort of voice. "You must all try to help me. And you on the other side as well, we need your assistance. There are unbelievers here."

I was bored up to the ears with it by now, and still feeling protective towards my Dad, so I decided to break things up. "Come out, come out, whoever you are," I sang out. "Your number's come up. We've got a job for you." I was thinking of the dishes in the kitchen waiting for the usual compulsory volunteers.

There was a glow in the air beside Aunt Em and next second a man was standing there looking just like something out of the panto sprung up through a trap. Brown

skin, sandals, a white kilt of what my Mum said afterwards looked like fine linen, a broad belt with a jewelled dagger stuck in it and a blue and yellow striped head-cloth that covered most of his very black hair. He wore a fair amount of heavy gold ornaments - I could tell it was real gold from the way Uncle Eddie's eyes bulged - round his neck and arms, but it didn't soften the effect one bit. He looked strong, powerful, solid.

At the moment however he was also looking pretty apprehensive, not surprising considering the commotion his arrival had raised. Gradually the noise died down as we saw him do nothing but stand there with his hands clasped in front of him as if he was praying and his head slightly bowed. Then he spoke, but although his lips moved what we heard popped up directly in our brains, not coming by way of our ears.

"The spirit of the Pharaoh Senmut answers the summons of the gods. What task have you for me to perform?" he cried, and stood waiting respectfully.

I didn't somehow feel it would be right to ask him to wash dishes so I waited too.

It was Grandad who broke the silence. He served in Egypt during the War, so I guess he felt that handling foreigners, even a Pharaoh, was more in his line than that of any of the rest of us.

"What're you doing here Johnny?" he asked sharply. "Who called you? No bak-sheesh! Imshi, imshi, yallah!"

"I felt your concentration, your call. The ushabti-spell summoned me."

"Good Lord! Ushabti!" exploded Uncle Vernon the historian. "Your Arabic won't mean anything to him Grandad! He's from way before that time." And then to Senmut, "What ushabti? Where?"

The Pharaoh looked around, searching. "The focus of the summons is near. Ah!" He went to the Christmas tree, still piled round with parcels to be handed out later, and picked out a small, slender package which I recognised as the one my Mum had made up for Grandad, and brought it back to the table.

In silence Uncle Vernon opened it and brought out the little figure, a close likeness of Senmut. It was now obvious when you could see them together. For a minute or two he studied it, turning it round and examining the back where I'd noticed odd-looking writing, hieroglyphics. Then he passed it over to Grandad.

"Yours," he said. "An ancient Egyptian

ushabti figure. Granite, I think, and we can definitely take it as being genuine after this. It should be the pride of your collection."

Grandad was staggered. "A what-kind-of-figure d'you call it?"

"A ushabti figure. The Egyptians used to put a lot of them in their tombs." Vernon began to hit his lecturer's stride. "They thought their gods were always liable to be calling on them for various duties in the after-life. The figures have a spell on the back of them binding them to obey the call instead and leave the real spirit free to go on lazing about heaven while the ushabti did the work. Apparently they had something there, too. Emily's powers and our efforts stirred up the spell when the figure was close by, so here he is."

The Pharaoh straightened and looked angrily round at us. "You did not know this? What spirits can you be? The spell orders me to obey the gods, to fulfill the wishes of Ra, Osiris, Horus --"

"Never mind honey. Enjoy it now you're here. We'll find something to keep you busy." This was Alice interrupting, and darned if she wasn't wriggling her shoulders and ogling him right in front of us all. He looked pretty impressive, I've got to admit, if you admire the he-man type, with his dark skin and his muscles rippling in the firelight. I guess Uncle Ed hadn't been out long enough to re-establish himself with her again yet.

Now he gave her a glare from where he'd worked his way around to behind the Pharaoh, but he didn't say anything. He was being very quiet. Ed used to fancy himself as a dip before he got ambitions to go after the big stuff, but he must have lost his pickpocket's touch since those days for as soon as he had a hand on one of those gold neck-chains Senmut felt it and whirled round whipping out his dagger.

"I see it now," he yelled. "This is a trial of my soul! The demons of the underworld are testing my purity of purpose. You set a loose woman on to distract me while a thief practices his trade under my eyes! I will prove my worthiness. I will destroy the evil-doer as I did when I was King!" He gave a bloodthirsty whoop and dived under the table after Eddie who had disappeared at the first flash of the blade. We heard gasps and thumps and Uncle Eddie's voice raised in desperation. "Listen to me! Smart fellow like you - why, you could pop up right inside a

bank vault! I'll finger them for you. Split fifty-fifty, eh?"

One thing about Grandad, when he starts re-living his war-days, he can sometimes go on too long, but he gets back the action-man style of his youth. Now he shouted in his best sergeant's tones, "Stop it Johnny! The law's well up with him. Stop it I say! I'm Horace Entwistle. You've got to obey Horace!"

Uncle Vernon gave a gasp. "Horace, Horus, Good God!" He murmured. "But, how long --"

But it was enough for the moment. Senmut emerged from under the table and peered into Grandad's face as Ed scuttled out at the opposite side.

"You are Horus?" he asked.

"Horace," repeated Grandad firmly.

"I see by the steadiness of your aura that you tell the truth," said the Pharaoh. He gestured towards Vernon. "And did not this one call you 'God' only now? I am at your service, great one."

Grandad let out a relieved sigh.

"You're a dangerous lad, Johnny," he said. "Wouldn't do to get careless around you. Cor, stone the crows --"

That did it. Senmut obeyed instantly. He glanced around swiftly and settled on the window. Crash! Through the glass went the onyx ash tray from the mantelshelf followed by the green marble Land's End lighthouse. As the astounded birds - and there were crows among them right enough - leapt up from the crumbs that Gran had put out on the grass for them, the contents of the coal scuttle hurried them on their way. Then before anyone could stop him, the Pharaoh snatched up the stone ushabti figure and hurled it out too. I suppose it was as near to suicide as you could get without intending it. The figure struck the garden wall, shattered into a dozen pieces, and Senmut was gone, just plain vanished, as the spell broke.

Aunt Em's gone back to vegetarianism, which promises a quieter time all round. I don't know how Uncle Ed's sorted out his home life but he got such a scare that he's going almost straight at present. Grandad reckons Senmut was the most promising Christmas gift he ever got. He's still trying to fit the bits of the ushabti together precisely enough to get it to work again. At his age he feels he could do with some free help around the garden.

I was sorry too that the affair ended so quickly - I had to volunteer to pitch in with the washing-up again.

George McIntyre lives in Aberdeen, and the humorous fantasy you have just sampled marks his debut in *Fantasy Tales*. "Why do 95% of fantasy/horror stories finish with the hero/heroine being overwhelmed by some foul and irresistible fate?" laments George. "It'd be nice to read of someone fighting back successfully sometimes. If the whole interest of the tale lies in the nature of the victim's horrible fate rather than in the struggle, where's the surprise or the point?" No surprise then that *Our Christmas Spirit* has a refreshingly up-beat ending...



IT WAS the first time Fred and Martha had taken an off-base holiday and it had been somewhat less than a success. The Hire Rocket broke down continually, the weather stank and, to cap it all, young Fred Jr. howled from morning 'til night.

On their last day the Hire Rocket packed up completely. With nothing else to do, they wandered into the maze of back-alleys that criss-crossed Celphi's capitol city. In the lee of a crowded street market they came upon a small restaurant. On the shuttered front, in the forty known languages of the galaxy, a single line message had been painstakingly printed. The English version ran as follows: 'We cater for all tastes

Bon Appetit

By SAMANTHA LEE

Illustration by DALLAS GOFFIN

- Please come inside'.

Martha raised her voice above Fred Jr's howling.

"Gee honey," she screeched, "I'm starved! Can we go in? They gotta sign in English. Maybe we can getta decent meal forra change."

"Some hopes," snorted Fred. "We haven't had anything worth eating since we landed on this Godforsaken planet. That travel agent sure saw us coming. I won't forget this holiday in a long time. Oh, for Gawd's sake, Martha, doesn't that goddam baby ever shut up?"

The interior of the restaurant was dimly lit by a faint, pink glow. It's padded alcoves were furnished with low, silver tables and soft piles of embroidered cushions. As Fred and Martha entered, all heads swivelled in their direction. The ensuing silence was filled by Fred Jr. shrieking at the top of his lungs.

A long, thin individual unwound himself from a corner and shimmied over. Like most of the customers he was bright purple in hue, had three legs, webbed fingers and a single, huge, green eye. Murmuring in the soft, guttural tones of the native Celphiian, he flapped his small, scaly wings in traditional greeting.

"Gotta table?", Fred enquired loudly, clamping a sweaty hand over the baby's squalling mouth. "We want eat. You understand?" He pointed in the direction of his oesophagus and raised his voice another decibel. "Eat. Savvy?"

The waiter beamed obligingly and ushered them to a vacant alcove.

"Goddam place is fulla geeks," muttered Fred, lowering his flabby body onto the mound of cushions. His wife plunked her skinny frame down beside him. Fred Jr., who was dropping off to sleep, awoke with a start and began exercising his lungs again.

"Dear Gawd, Martha," yelled Fred. "If you don't keep that goddam baby quiet I'll go beserk. I swear he hasn't closed his goddam trap in days.

"Well?", he shouted at the waiter who was standing expectantly at his left elbow. "What're ya waiting for dummy? Where's the goddam menu? Menu?" He used two podgy forefingers to draw a square in the air, then pointed at his open mouth. "Menu," he roared. "We want eat."

The waiter smiled a purple smile and, producing a cube of plastic from a flap in his domed forehead, handed it to Fred with a flourish.

"Goddam foreigners," muttered Fred in disgust, turning the cube over and over in a vain attempt to decipher the Cephian script. "This is no good. Goddam geek language. Aintcha gotta English menu?"

The waiter raised his eyebrow.

"Holy Moses," hollered Fred. "What'm I doin' here? I swear I'm about to go crazy. This fool doesn't unnerstand a goddam word I say and I can't hear myself think for the noise of that goddam kid! Here." He thrust Fred Jr. into the waiter's webbed hands. "Put him somewhere

until we've eaten. Somewheres I can't hear him. And bring us some food. Anything."

He made shooing motions at his screaming son and pointed at his mouth again for good measure.

The waiter bobbed his cyclopean head and undulated off.

The food, when it arrived, was a pleasant surprise. The vegetables were cooked to perfection and the meat fairly melted in the mouth. Fred and Martha stuffed themselves until every last morsel had gone. Then, sucking the remaining vestiges of gravy off his double chin, Fred gave a resounding belch and called for the bill and the baby.

When neither was forthcoming, he called for the Manager.

The Manager flapped his wings suavely and enquired, in impeccable English, whether the lady and gentleman had enjoyed their lunch?

"Never mind the goddam lunch. What we want now is the goddam baby," Fred said, heatedly. "Wheel it out. We gotta go."

The Manager stretched his eye wide.

"The baby, sir?", he said.

"Yeah," shouted Fred. "Goddam it, the only one that speaks English is deaf. The baby. And make it snappy."

"Oh dear," said the Manager. "I'm afraid there's been a dreadful mistake ..."

As with last issue's tale, *Take Five*, Samantha Lee's *Bon Appetit* originally appeared (in slightly different form) on Capital Radio's *Moment of Terror* series. Besides writing for TV and radio, Samantha's short fiction has been published in *Pan Book of Horror Stories*, *Space*, *Spectre*, *Knave*, *4th Armada* *Monster Book* and *Nightmares*. Author of 'The Lightbringer Trilogy', her fourth novel, *The Gingerbread House*, has been optioned by Orion Pictures and she is writing the screenplay of *The Quebec Plot* for producer Harry Saltzman. She recently completed a children's version of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* for Beaver Books, adding a number of gruesome murders for the kids to enjoy!





Stephen Jones & David Sutton
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AFTER our high hopes of returning to a more regular schedule, as mentioned in last issue's editorial, we only managed to get one issue out this year. Events conspire against small press publications which are not always easily overcome - our apologies to readers and contributors alike, and we hope you consider this issue up to our usual standard.

Since our mention of his illness last issue, Manly Wade Wellman sadly died on April 6th. Manly was always a good friend of *Fantasy Tales*, and we published his fiction in issues 6 and 10. Our deepest sympathy goes to his wife Frances and with it fond memories of the Wellmans' hospitality during our visits to North Carolina. Our thanks to Karl Edward Wagner for allowing us to reprint *The White Road* (from the June 1928 *Weird Tales* and *Worse Things Waiting*), and Karl's own eloquent tribute appears in this issue.

At this year's British Fantasy Convention (held over September 26th-28th), we picked up our sixth British Fantasy Award for *Fantasy Tales* to add to the others on the mantle shelf. Our thanks to everyone who voted for us.

We are also proud to announce that three stories - all incidentally published in *Fantasy Tales 14* - have found subsequent prominence: Clive Barker's *The Forbidden* won in the Best Short Fiction category of this year's British Fantasy Awards; Chris Naylor's *The Castle at World's End* was picked by editor Arthur W. Saha for DAW Books' *The Year's Best Fantasy Stories 12*, and Karl Edward Wagner selected Ramsey Campbell's *The Sneering* for *The Year's Best Horror Stories XIV*, also from DAW. And a story from our very first issue - Brian Lumley's *Mylakhron the Immortal* - turned up in the August/September issue of the *Games Magazine Adventure*.

Finally, remember to send in your

letters of comment, your votes for your three favourite stories this issue, and check out our back issues on page 1 - many of these are becoming quite scarce and will not be available for very much longer...

BACK ON TOP

Roger Dard, from Western Australia, writes: "In a previous letter in *FT9*, I expressed disappointment at what I thought was a decline in your standard of literature. So I'm happy to say that with issue number 15 my favourite magazine is right back on top. It was a perfect issue, from the great cover to the back page. There wasn't a story I didn't like. Perhaps *Long Walk Home* by Grant was the one I liked least: A well-written mood piece, but not really my cup of tea. As a *Weird Tales* lover all my life, I would have liked to place Leiber's *In the X-Ray* as the best story in the issue; but enjoyable as it was, I ranked it only number four. The three best stories were, number one, *The Terminus*; two, *After Nightfall*, and three, *Amorous of the Far*. I loved Newman's ending to *The Terminus* - 'They weren't dead or alive, just waiting.' I was tickled pink at Newman's use of the Goodge Street tube for his shuddery goings-on. When I was in London in 1974, I was staying just off Tottenham Court Road, and Goodge St. was the nearest underground station. If I ever get to London again, I'm going to catch the bus!"

LEIBER APPRECIATED

From Street Ashton, Rugby, Peter Bayliss comments: "My first choice in *FT15* is the lead story, Fritz Leiber's *In the X-Ray*. I generally prefer to see new work instead of old *Weird Tales* reprints. But it will be new to most readers, and I think it is such a good story that it's well worth bringing back. *The Exile of Earthendale* by Adrian Cole

is my second choice. You don't need to be familiar with the 'Voidal' stories to appreciate this one, but I think it may be helpful to have read *First Make Them Mad*, the story in *FT#* which first introduced 'Elfloq'. My third choice is a tie between *Down by the Sea* by Malcolm Furnass and *After Nightfall* by David Riley. However, David's village of Heron was rather too much like downtown Arkham. I would've put Samantha Lee's *Take Five* in third place, except it is too brief to compare with the longer stories in this issue. All credit to Samantha, though, for creating the atmosphere of her jazz band in such a short space. Frances Garfield's *Amorous of the Far* has a good twist at the end, but lacks the atmosphere that I like in a good fantasy story. The ending puts obvious limitations on the character development of Dorsey. *The Terminus* by Kim Newman is based on an idea which has been used too many times in the past. It might have been redeemed by a good ending, but it was all too predictable and disappointing. I was also disappointed with Charles L. Grant's *Long Walk Home*. The atmosphere and suspense is built up only to be let down in a rather tame ending (or perhaps I missed something?) Not what one expects from a writer of Mr. Grant's stature, and not up to the standard of his excellent *The Generation Walts* in *FT#*. I am impressed with Tom Campbell's superb front cover. And I think the artwork generally is up to *FT*'s usual high standard. Particularly good is Stephen Fabian's illustration to *Shadrezzar* and Mark Dunn's drawing for *Down by the Sea*."

NOT THE BEST

Nic Howard, from Reading, Berkshire, comments: "I enjoyed *FT#*, although there were no stories in it that could be called major. It's always pleasing to read an unfamiliar Leiber story, although in this case *In the X-Ray* is no classic. On looking it up, I was amazed to see that it's contemporary with his *The Girl With the Hungry Eyes*. Tom Campbell's artwork was much appreciated - the black & white one being very much in the *Weird Tales* style. Even to giving away the punch line! The gruesome cover was wonderful, one of the best colour ones yet. More Campbell please. Frances Garfield's *Amorous of the Far* and Kim Newman's *The Terminus* were both enjoyable; Newman's especially as I like travelling on the

tube. With all the rebuilding work going on, the last paragraph might take on another meaning... Charles Grant does it again in *Long Walk Home*! That man must be Autumn incarnate - he catches the hushed feel of that season's darker side perfectly. I feel that plotting isn't often Charlie's strong point - this story is one of those - but for atmosphere, and emotional content, his work is up there with the greats: HPL, Machen, Leiber etc. I feel that I have *taken part* in his stories, rather than just *read* them. The other stories were even more minor, I feel; ok as such, but acting mainly as space-fillers for the stories I've listed and as props for the ever-excellent artwork. Not the best issue, then. But simple and enjoyable, which is what magazines need as their base to survive. (And I don't object in the least to advertising as it doesn't detract from the fiction content and provides the ready!)"

GREAT DISAPPOINTMENT

From Rob Gregg, Romford, Essex: "Issue 15 was a great disappointment after the excellence of the previous issue. The highlight was undoubtedly *In the X-Ray* by the old master, Fritz Leiber - it is quite incredible that this tale was penned in 1949 as it is not dated at all. When one reads SF tales from the 1930s and '40s they are invariably dated. None of the other stories were really up to standard, but after due consideration I'd place *The Terminus* by Kim Newman in the runner-up spot. A nice, interesting little tale, but rather anti-climatic. Third I'd place *Take Five* by Samantha Lee - well written and interesting, but oh so predictable! Of the others, *Down by the Sea* started promisingly but didn't seem to get anywhere. I've never been into the dense style of Charles L. Grant. *After Nightfall* was fairly good, but Frances Garfield and Adrian Cole bored me silly. Personally I don't like verse, so I'll not comment on it. Excellent Campbell cover this issue - I retract my previous comments on your colour covers."

WORTH WAITING FOR

Ian Mundell, from Marlborough, Wiltshire, writes to tell us: "Congratulations on *Fantasy Tales* 15; you're right, it was well worth waiting for. I thought you presented a varied and well-balanced collection of stories, as opposed to issue 14 where Clive Barker's (excellent) tale

tended to over-shadow the rest. Top of the heap this time was *After Nightfall*, beautifully paced and echoing of Lovecraft, if a little less frantic. Second place goes to *Long Walk Home* which, having walked in the dark myself, seemed all too real. Very subtle and an object lesson in the building of suspense. Third is *The Terminus* by virtue of its closing scene. This is not to say the other stories weren't also good. I found *In the X-Ray* a little predictable, perhaps because of the picture on page 2. This gave the game away a bit. *Take Five* was also rather predictable and I thought *Amorous of the Far* had a disappointingly flat ending after such a good build-up. However, these are minor points. Also to be commended is the poem *Shadrezzar*. The best artwork in the issue was by Stephen Fabian (p.22), closely followed by Sue Simpson (p.35)."

SATISFYING ISSUE

Last issue's contributor, Phil Emery, writes from Newcastle, Staffs: "*Fantasy Tales 15* was well up to standard. A very effective use of your full colour covers. (The first, on number 13, was my favourite *FT* cover. Mind you, I thought no.14 was your worst. The latest cover is, in my opinion, again back on the right track). As to the contents, I'll go through the also-rans first: *The Terminus* had a very intriguing idea but the ending disappointed. Maybe it was the way the last line seemed flat after an excellent build-up, but it felt a bit lame to me. *Down by the Sea* was competently written, and I can't put my finger on anything specific, but it didn't really make my imagination catch fire. I wasn't able to get involved in the story. It entertained me, yes, but I found it in some way less than fully satisfactory. Sorry I can't point to anything concrete. Nice to see Adrian Cole back. I remember enjoying *First Make Them Mad* in issue 4. *The Exile of Earthendale* was all the more welcome as it was the nearest thing to sword & sorcery this issue. Still, not quite in my top three. *Take Five* filled two pages very satisfactorily. The basic ending was fairly obvious early on, but was handled stylishly enough. As to David Riley's *After Nightfall*: The description of the village I thought very well handled. So too the story's climax and epilogue. But one or two lines jarred with me as being slightly melodramatic and some of the similes in

the piece didn't work for me. So this doesn't quite make best three for me. *Amorous of the Far* does. It completely had me fooled as to how it would end. This, besides being a well-paced piece of good storytelling makes it my third favourite. In the *X-Ray* comes second. I'll take competent Fritz Leiber over many writers' better efforts. The story had me hooked from the first sentence to the finely executed climax. Published in 1949, eh? Like the other *Weird Tales* (and *Strange Stories*) reprints you've run, this has aged well. I'm all in favour of these continuing, but maybe occasionally rather than every issue. Charles L. Grant's *Long Walk Home* is my favourite piece in issue 15. A real chiller throughout. Wonderfully evocative. Finally I must thank you for including my verse *Shadrezzar* with this company. You certainly did me proud, presenting it with a Fabian illustration! A very satisfying issue for me in many ways. Keep up the good work."

CAMPBELL SUPERB

From Boscombe East, Bournemouth, artist Alan Hunter writes: "Another excellent issue of *FT*. Perhaps lacking the strength and impact of the previous issue, since this was all short stories, but they were all great stories nevertheless. What did make an impact this time were the illustrations, and mainly the work of one artist - Tom Campbell. The increased use of full-page illos helped, particularly with the lead-in on page 2. The story begins, 'Do the dead come back?' and the facing full-page gave me the eerie feeling that perhaps they do!"

MOST POPULAR STORY

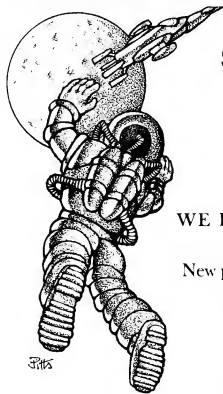
The most popular story in *Fantasy Tales 15* was our classic *Weird Tales* reprint, *In the X-Ray* by Fritz Leiber. Close second was Charles L. Grant's *Long Walk Home*, while *After Nightfall* by David Riley came third. Remember to send your three favourite stories from this issue to the Wembley address on page 2.

ARTISTS IN THIS ISSUE

The artwork on pages 18 and 49 is the work of Alfred R. Klosterman; Dave Carson contributed the illustrations on pages 32 and 35; Jim Pitts illustrated *Eradication's Rise* and the *Contents* heading; the artwork for *The Cauldron* is by John Grandfield.

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